HENRI CORBIN

ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL THINKER

BERSERKER
BOOKS

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

BOOK I – The Pilgrim from the West

CHAPTER I - A Spiritual Biography CHAPTER II - Hermeneutics and Heidegger CHAPTER III - Corbin and the Iranian World CHAPTER IV - The Metaphysics of Imagination

1) An Intermediate World of Images

2) The World of the Imaginal and the Science of Mirrors

3) The Reversal of Time and Space

4) The Post-Mortem Otherworld of Imaginal Forms

CHAPTER V – Corbin's Four Journeys through the Iranian-Islamic World BOOK II – From the Cycle of Prophecy (Nobowwat) to the Cycle of Initiation (Walâyat)

CHAPTER I - The Phenomenon of the Holy Book

CHAPTER II - Prophecy and Walâyat (Imâmat)

1) The Cycle of Prophecy

2) The Prophet of Islam as the Seal of Prophecy

3) Walî, Nabî and Rasûl

4) The Cycle of Walâyat

5) The internalisation of the cycles of prophecy: the 'seven prophets of your being'

CHAPTER III – Prophetic philosophy

1) The union of the philosopher and the Nabî, an antidote to the double truth

2) Prophetic Philosophy and Angelology

3) Rejection of the Incarnation and historicism

4) Prophetic philosophy and Shia Islam

CHAPTER IV - Shia Islam

1) Shi'ism or the Esoteric Dimension of Islam

2) Shi'ism and Ta'wîl

3) The Threefold Struggle of

Shi'ism CHAPTER V –

Imamology

CHAPTER VI - The Twelve Imams, the Form that Shapes the Temple of Prophecy

1) The Twelfth Imam and the Interval of the Occultation

2) Spiritual chivalry CHAPTER

VII – Ismailism Esoteric tawhid

BOOK III - From the Metaphysics of Essences to the Theosophy of Presence CHAPTER I

- Averroism and Avicennism

CHAPTER II - Avicenna or a strongly Neoplatonised Aristotelianism

1) The Metaphysics of Essences

CHAPTER III - Latin Avicennism

CHAPTER IV - Sohrawardî and 'Eastern' Theosophy

1) Genealogy of Ishrâq

2) Sohrawardî and Iran

CHAPTER V - The Convergence of Philosophy and Mystical Experience

1) The East and the West

2) Presentational Knowledge and Representational Knowledge

CHAPTER VI – Mulla Sadra or the Theosophy of Presence as Testimony CHAPTER

VII – The Priority of Existence

CHAPTER VIII - Intrasubstantial Movement

CHAPTER IX - Unification of the knowing subject with the known form CHAPTER

X - The Imaginal and the World of the Soul

CHAPTER XI - The Three Resurrections

1) A philosophy of presence as testimony

2) The Triple Growth and the Posthumous Becoming of the Soul

3) The Legacy of Mollâ Sadrâ's Thought BOOK

IV - From Doctrinal Exposition to Visionary Narrative

CHAPTER I – Avicenna's 'Eastern' philosophy

1) The Tale of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan

2) The Tale of the Bird (Risâlat al-Tayr)

3) The Metamorphoses of the Bird in Persian Mystical Poetry

CHAPTER II - Avicenna and Sohrawardi

CHAPTER III - Sohrawardî and the visionary narratives

1) The Event as Narrative (Hikâyat)

2) Nâ-kojâ-âbâd (the imaginal world)

3) Active Imagination as an Organ of Supersensible Perception

CHAPTER IV - Western Exile - (an initiatory hikâyat)

CHAPTER V - The Encounter with the Personal Angel - (process of individuation)

1) Angel-Self – Perfect Nature

2) The Two Wings of Gabriel

CHAPTER VI - From the heroic epic to the mystical epic

1) The Ecstatic Sage of Ancient Persia (Kay Khosraw)

CHAPTER VII – Transfigured Eros

1) Beauty, Love, Nostalgia-Sorrow BOOK

V - From Human Love to Divine Love

CHAPTER I - Rûzbehân or the Master of Inspired Paradoxes

1) A Visionary Par Excellence

2) A vision that thinks in images

CHAPTER II - Clouding and the Trial of the Veil

CHAPTER III - The Inner Pilgrimage

1) Theophany as Divine Beauty within Man

2) Muhammad, Prophet of the Religion of Love

3) Amphiboly or the phenomenon of the mirror

4) From metaphorical love to true Love

5) From Exoteric Tawhid to Esoteric Tawhid

CHAPTER IV – Inspired Paradoxes

1) The Malâmatî Sage

CHAPTER V - Ibn 'Arabî and the Creative Imagination

1) The Witness at Averroes's Funeral

2) The Pilgrim from the East

3) The Disciple of Khizr

CHAPTER VI - Theophany, the Primordial Cloud and the Divine Names

1) The Divine Names

CHAPTER VII - Creative Imagination as Theophany

1) Conjunctive Imagination and Disjunctive Imagination

2) Imagination as an 'intermediate world'

3) Imagination as spiritual hermeneutics (ta'wîl)

4) God ‘as imagined’ or ‘God as conceived in beliefs’

5) Imagination as a meeting place between human love and divine love CHAPTER VIII – The religion of love

Conclusion – The relevance of Henry Corbin’s thought today Notes

Acknowledgements

BOOK I
The Pilgrim of the West

CHAPTER I
A Spiritual Biography

The book we are offering our readers is not the biography of a thinker, nor is it a more or less detailed description of his works, and even less a critical study of a philosophical approach. It is, above all, a personal endeavour to trace the course of an exceptional experience in the quest for spirituality. Our approach, therefore, follows the course of a spiritual adventure that remains, from the outset, a pilgrimage to a lost continent. There is the man, his quest, and the world to which this quest leads. As for the multifaceted man that was Henry Corbin, it is difficult to pigeonhole him under a single label. He is a philologist by virtue of the rigour of his scholarly work; we owe him the critical edition of numerous Arabic and Persian texts, as well as masterful translations of rare quality. He is also a philosopher by virtue of the breadth and depth of his thought. To the quest of the man in search of the Spirit, Corbin makes an essential contribution; he draws this contribution from the prophetic tradition of Iranian-Islamic thought; yet, in drawing upon it, he rethinks it, and in rethinking it, he identifies with it so completely that the central problem of Iranian gnosis becomes, in a sense, the existential longing of every Stranger in search of his Angel. He is an Orientalist in the Sohrawardian sense of the term: *mostashriq*, that is to say, the 'Seeker of the East' or he who aspires to emerge from his 'Western exile'. He is therefore all of this and yet something more: a pilgrim, or if you will, a *homo viator*. Indeed, he states this quite plainly himself: 'My training was originally entirely philosophical; that is why, strictly speaking, I am neither a Germanist nor even an Orientalist, but a philosopher pursuing his Quest wherever the spirit leads him. If it has led me to Freiburg, to Tehran, to Isfahan, these cities remain for me essentially 'emblematic cities', the symbols of a permanent journey t[1] ."

This quest therefore encompasses several aspects, which together form a spiritual journey ranging from the medieval studies revived by Étienne Gilson, through the illuminative gnosis of Sohrawardî, to Protestant thinkers such as Luther and Hamann, and the existentialist philosophy of Heidegger. We can distinguish a Corbin who is, as Richard Stauffer so aptly puts it, at once a 'Protestant theologian', a Heideggerian hermeneutist, an Orientalist initiated into gnosis, and a historian of religions. There is no linear progression in this journey, since Corbin's activities were, in a sense, simultaneous. Just as he had once set about learning Arabic and Sanskrit at the same time, so too was he already an Orientalist when he became acquainted with Heidegger's hermeneutics. The transition from Heidegger to Sohrawardî, which aroused so much curiosity, makes sense only if viewed as an epistemological break in which Heidegger's Dasein is, in a certain sense, transcended to embrace the eschatological dimension of a Being-for-beyond-death. We shall return to this later.

The stages of this astonishing journey weave the fabric of a spiritual topography in which the 'emblematic cities' each typify, in their own way, the degrees of a *progressio harmonica*: from Paris to Freiburg, from Tehran to Isfahan – the Emerald City – Corbin's itinerary ascends the rungs of the ladder of Being. Whether Corbin was a Gnostic or not, whether he was personally initiated by the Hermeneutic Angel whose pedagogical function he never ceased to highlight, we shall never know. The fact remains that when one takes a broad view of the arc of his life, one is struck by the synchronic coincidence of events. Indeed, one gets the impression that Corbin, in summarising them

just as he had done before his death, he perceived in it the hidden design of an invisible hand. Indeed, all the sequences come together to form the eloquent symbols of an exceptional journey: Gilson and the medieval world, Bréhier, Plotinus and the *Upanishads*, Massignon and the discovery of Sohrawardî, Baruzi and Protestant theology, Cassirer and mythical thought, and Heidegger and phenomenology; and, underpinning it all, the intersection of two chosen lands: 'sky-coloured' Iran, the favoured homeland of mystics and poets, and old Germany, 'the homeland of poets and philosophers'. Two essentially complementary encounters. Just as Gilson's lectures had led him to the study of Arabic and the discovery of Avicenna, in whom he discerned the connection between cosmology and angelology – so crucial to his later research – so too did Baruzi's influence introduce him to the voice of Germany's Protestant mystics. But from one journey to the next, what remained Corbin's primary concern was the problem of hermeneutics, or what he later called the 'phenomenon of the Holy Book'. That is why, he says, "Iran and Germany were the geographical landmarks of a Quest that was in fact continuing in spiritual regions that are not on our map s[2] ".

Hamann had taught him that 'To speak is *to translate*: from an angelic language into a human language[3]'; Heidegger had provided him with the key to hermeneutics; Swedenborg gave him a glimpse of the 'science of correspondences'; but it was Sohrawardî who offered him a true refuge. For the
The world to which he granted him access is none other than Persia, situated geographically at the centre, a 'middle and mediating world'; Persia, or ancient Iran, says Corbin, 'is not merely a nation or an empire; it is an entire spiritual universe, a cradle of the history of religion s[4]'. Persia is also, ontologically, a world of the In-Between, a world where *the Image*, as a metaphysical reality, requires its own noetic value that rises to the level of the Land of Nowhere (*Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*), the privileged setting for the events of the soul and visionary narratives. Persia is also, eschatologically, a Land of Waiting, the Land where the Hidden Imam prepares the hour in the Between-Times of the Occultation. From that moment on, Corbin's destiny was sealed. The pilgrim had rediscovered his Orient of the Enlightenment, and the entirety of Corbin's subsequent journey would now be directed towards a deeper exploration of this 'intermediate and mediating' world, where philosophical knowledge and spiritual experience remain inseparable. But what, then, were the stages of this journey? To give even a brief outline of his spiritual biography, one can only paraphrase what he himself so aptly put it in his 'Biographical Postscript to a Philosophical Interview'. We find Corbin at the crossroads of the great spiritual events of our century: the revival of medieval studies in France, the growing interest in Orientalism sparked by the crisis of European consciousness, and the problem of hermeneutics posed by phenomenology.

No doubt, from a very early age, Corbin, like any true scholar, took an interest in exploring uncharted territory, and it was with great enthusiasm that, as early as 1923–1924, he discovered Étienne Gilson's lectures in the Department of Religious Studies at the École pratique des hautes études. What he learnt from Gilson was how to read and interpret ancient texts. Such was the admiration aroused by this masterful teaching that Corbin was already determined to take it as his model: he would later attempt to apply to Arabic and Persian texts—which he would publish and translate with commentary—the same rigorous understanding that Gilson had lavished on the renewal of Latin texts. His ambition was already set, but he would still have to find the key to interpretation and undergo further transformations. Gilson's lectures led him to discover another fact no less decisive for his future career: the importance of Arabic texts translated into Latin as early as the 12th century by the School of Toledo; and among these texts, the work of Avicenna. The synergy between a cosmology that translates into angelology and an anthropology that conforms to the dual hierarchy of the Intelligences and the Celestial Souls opened up the immense horizons of Avicennism to him. But to truly grasp the unprecedented resonances of the Gnostic extension

(*Ishrâqî*) school of Avicennism in Iran, he would have to wait for the discovery of another key figure in Iranian Islam: the man who, taking up the mantle of Avicenna's Eastern philosophy, thereby restored the theosophy of the ancient Sages of Iran: *Shaykh al-Ishrâq*, Shihâboddîn Yahyâ Sohrawardî. And it was Louis Massignon, the author of *The *Passion of al-Hallaj**, who opened this door for him.

For a young student who had enrolled at the École des Langues Orientales in 1926–27, immersed in the study of Arabic and later Sanskrit, a refuge was needed. It was Massignon who offered him that refuge. Just as, alongside his study of medieval philosophy, Corbin had attended Émile Bréhier's lectures on Plotinus and the influence of the Upanishads with no less diligence, and just as India's contribution to Neoplatonism had further encouraged him to study Sanskrit, that is to say, to reconcile two disciplines which at the time proved to be fundamentally contradictory; in the same way, the discovery of Sohrawardî, thanks to Massignon, brought the Indian adventure to an end. "After two years, I was to encounter on the path to the East the 'signpost' indicating the decisive direction of a path of no return; from then on, my path would lie through the Arabic and Persian texts[5]."

On the other hand, whilst Émile Bréhier, as an heir to *the Enlightenment*, issued a clear rejection of the Christian philosophy that Gilson was specifically seeking to restore, Louis Massignon, for his part, led his students from the most dazzling mysticism to the most trivial political events. Massignon's sublime ambiguities regarding Shi'ism and the highly emotive nature of his lectures kindled the flame of mysticism in Corbin's soul: 'One could not escape his influence. His fiery spirit, his fearless penetration into the mysteries of mystical life in Islam, where no one had yet ventured in this way, the nobility of his indignation at the cowardice of this world—all this inevitably left its mark on the minds of his young listen s[6] . "Moreover, Massignon, whilst explicitly acknowledging Iran's essential contribution to the Islamic world (having freed it from all racial and ethnic ties), admitted that he had never felt at home there. Corbin, on the other hand, felt entirely at home there. And by an inexplicable paradox, it was Massignon who provided him with the opportunity. Following Corbin's repeated questions on the relationship between philosophy and mysticism, Massignon presented him with the lithographed edition of Sohrawardî's principal work, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq* (Eastern Theosophy), and said to him: 'Here, I believe there is something in this book for you. ' That something, says Corbin, 'was the company of the young Shaykh al-Ishrâq, which has never left me throughout my life. I have always been a Platonist (in the broadest sense of the word, of course); I believe one is born a Platonist, just as one might be born an atheist, a materialist, and so on. The unfathomable mystery of pre-existential choices. The young Platonist that I was at the time could not help but be inspired by the man who was the 'Imam of the Platonists of [Persia'7](#) ". It was also his enrolment at the School of Oriental Languages that led him to the National Library, where he was appointed as an orientalist in November 1928; and it was, he said, 'this stint at the National Library that was to lead, paradoxically, to my definitive escape to the East t[8] '.

Whilst the solemn figure of the Master of Enlightenment (Sohrawardî) beckons to him on the horizon and invites him to

undertake the journey to the East, Germany, on the other hand, will enable him to make this inevitable transition: via Luther, Hamann and the Protestant theologians, he will find, thanks to Heidegger, the *clavis hermeneutica* of high mystical speculation. Here comes into play Henry Corbin's encounter with Germany. Corbin had already been a translator of Sohrawardî, before becoming the translator of Heidegger and Barth, but access to the world of Sohrawardî required a comprehensive method. The transition from Heidegger to Sohrawardî is more than a natural progression: it is a shift from the time of horizons to the inner time of the soul, marking a *break*, but a break such that Corbin never again remained at the hermeneutical level revealed by the *Dasein* of the Heideggerian vision. As early as 1939, he set off, accompanied by his wife, on a mission to Turkey, tasked with collecting photocopies of all the manuscripts of

Sohrawardî's works, scattered across the libraries of Istanbul. The mission was intended to last three months, but it continued until 1945. For in the meantime, the Second World War had broken out. The daily dialogue with Sohrawardî and the long period of silence imposed on him by this involuntary exile taught him, he said, 'the inestimable virtues of silence' and the 'discipline of the arcane'[9] . He was cut off from the influence of philosophical schools and immersed himself in the study of the Shaykh's works, gradually becoming initiated into the mysteries of his thought, allowing himself to be imbued with that theosophical (*ishrâqî*) atmosphere which became, in a sense, his second nature.

As for the influence of German thought on Corbin, one must above all mention the decisive role played by the Baruzi brothers: Joseph, the elder, and Jean, the younger, who stood in for Alfred Loisy at the Collège de France, before becoming holder of the chair of history of religions there himself. What remained on the agenda in his lectures was the theology of the young Luther, which was in vogue in Germany; and following him, the great spiritual figures of Protestantism: Sebastian Franck, Caspar Schwenkfeld, Valentin Weigel, Johann Arndt. "I began," says Corbin, "to perceive certain resonances, like the call of a distant carillon inviting me to explore regions encompassed by what I was later to call 'the phenomenon of the Holy Book'. It was the path of *hermeneutics* that was already opening up in the morning mists[10]."

This marked the start of a series of trips to Germany between 1930 and 1936. In 1930, Corbin travelled to Marburg an der Lahn, where he met the renowned Rudolph Otto, author of the book **Das Heilige** (*The Sacred*), which proved a landmark in the study of religion as a numinous phenomenon. Otto, in developing the categories of the Sacred, had derived the concept of the radically other (*das Ganz andere*) from the idea *of anyadeva* in the Upanishads. If the numinous provokes astonishment, it is because it cannot be contained within the common, rational categories of discursive thought. The 'radically other' thus forms the basis of an apophatic theology; not only does it oppose reason, but it is in every respect its opposite. Ultimately, the sacred, and the mysticism that results from it, is first and foremost 'a theology of *the mirum:* of the radically other'[11] . The Sacred is that which repels us as *the tremendum* and attracts us at the same time as *the fascinans*, hence its paradoxical language which unsettles our understanding and expresses itself as the union of opposites (*coïncidentia oppositorum*). Thus, the idea of apophatic and affirmative theology contained within esoteric unity, of reverential awe, and of the paradoxes arising from the divine Attributes of Beauty (*Jamâl*) and Majesty (*Jalâl*) are all categories that Corbin will find in the speculative gnosis of Islam and will seek to explore their manifold connotations.

During this trip to Germany, Corbin also met Albert-Marie Schmidt, a lecturer in French, who presented him with a work by Swedenborg: the French translation of **Heaven and Hell**. From that point on, the Swedish visionary's work was to remain a constant companion to Corbin throughout his life. He would later draw on this introduction in a lengthy lecture on 'Comparative Spiritual Hermeneutics (1. Swedenborg; 2. Ismaili Gnosis)[(12)] ", Corbin examines the theory of correspondences, the Ages of Humanity, *the hexaemeron* of the creation of the spiritual man, and compares Swedenborg's interpretative method with Shi'ite and Ismaili *ta'wîl* to arrive at a "hermeneutical situation" common to the People of the Book and the way in which "mystics, mystics or mystical theosophists have read or read the Bible in Christianity and the Qur'an in Islam".

It was through Professor Theodor Siegfried, who had been authorised by Rudolf Otto, that Corbin first heard of Karl Barth. He discovered Karl Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. He immersed himself, as he put it, 'with fervour' in the study of Barth's 'dialectical theology' and became, as with Heidegger, the first translator of Barth's works into French. It is to Corbin that we owe the French version of the short work entitled *Die Not der evangelischen Kirche* (The Distress of the Protestant Church), which appeared in French under the title *Misère et grandeur de l'Église évangélique*.

In 1931–1932, drawing inspiration from Barth for a renewal of Protestant theology, Corbin founded, with his friends Denis de Rougemont, Roland de Pury, Albert-Marie Schmidt and Roger Jezequel, a journal entitled *Hic et Nunc*. Richard Stauffer considers that the journal transcends the narrow confines of Barthianism: 'The manifesto published in the first issue of the journal, whilst taking up the *leitmotifs* of the young Barth's theology, clearly shows that the editorial team had no intention of being subservient to him' (13). Indeed, the principles set out in the manifesto are of a general nature; they state, for example:

'Faced with *philosophers* who mock humanity and fail even to realise that they no longer have any answers to offer to its perpetual and pressing questions; in the face of philosophers who, from Descartes to Kant, or from Hegel to Marx, believed they could save us from anguish by grounding the human being in the self, in intelligence and will supposedly fallen, there is cause and reason to affirm, with one of the prophets of this age[14], that a man's reason is not his raison d'être: *"Cogitor ergo sum"* (I am thought)[15]…" As for Corbin's contribution to this journal, we shall discuss it in the following paragraph.

My foray into Barthianism was short-lived: 'Before long, I no longer felt at ease with "Barthism" and dialectical theology. We regarded Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky as our spiritual forebears. That was all well and good, but it wasn't enough to shake up philosophy in the way my friends were inclined to do. Sohrawardî had already signalled to me, warning that, since this 'upheaval' was taking place at the expense of a philosophy that did not deserve the name, there was a need to regain access to the *sophia* of anoth e philosophy [16] . Indeed, Corbin could no longer follow the later Barth, author of **Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf**. The gulf between the "commentary on *the Epistle to the Romans*, with its prophetic flashes, and the ponderous, colossal dogmatics" was too great for him to endorse. What had initially appealed to Corbin was precisely this 'mantle of the prophet' which Barth now wished to cast aside, for did he not openly declare that 'I feel neither the right nor the duty to keep the mantle of the prophet ' [17] ? Barth's philosophy left Corbin facing a 'gaping abyss', and because this philosophy ignored the *res religiosa*, it heralded not the future of Protestantism as Keyserling had hoped, but the 'theology of the death of God, which was bound to degenerate into a theology of revolution and ultimately into a theology of class struggle'.

By the time he met Barth, Corbin had already encountered the great Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, the author of *An Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics*. Here again Corbin found a kindred spirit, a line of thought that responded to his deepest concerns: the idea of an eschatological Christianity that had succumbed to the temptation of history, ultimately reducing itself to historical Christianity and secularisation. From then on, it identified with the outer man rather than the inner man, whose eschatological dimension heralded a metaphysics of Return to God. Since we are speaking of Russian thinkers, let us also mention that Corbin became friends with the Russian philosopher Alexandre Koyré, famous for his monumental work on Jacob Boehme, and with Alexandre Kojève (Kojevnikov), who was partly responsible for the revival of Hegelian studies in France. Corbin took an active part in the philosophical debates that animated the young researchers of the time. The confrontation between Husserl's phenomenology and that of Heidegger, as well as the confrontation between Heidegger and Jaspers, were the order of the day and fuelled the discussions that occupied the long evenings at Gabriel Marcel's home.

Two stays in Hamburg brought Corbin into contact with Ernst Cassirer, the thinker of symbolic forms. Of him, Corbin said, 'he broadened my path towards what I was seeking and dimly sensed, and which was later to become my entire philosophy of *the mundus imaginalis*, a term I owe to our Persian Platonists[18]'. Cassirer did indeed show that the categories of time, space and

causal relationships were transformed within the mythical worldview and took on qualities entirely different from those that govern the methods of scientific knowledge. Mythical thought revealed a mode of being with its own categories of time, space and causality: whilst time is reversible and space is qualitative in relation to the events that take place within it, causality presents itself as the coincidence of heterogeneous elements rather than sequential causality; the part is identical to the whole by virtue of the principle of *'pars pro toto '*. Everything can arise from everything; the universe can emerge from a lotus flower just as it can from the creative thought of a founding demiurge. For, according to Cassirer, mythical thought is *concrete* in the etymological sense of the term (if we derive this word from the verb *con-crescere*: the act of agglomerating whilst developing). And whilst scientific knowledge strives to conclude that distinct elements are cohesive, "mythical intuition allows what it links to coincide; uniting the various elements through coincidence, it is a sort of cement capable of agglomerating the most heterogene e[19] ". Thus the world of *the Image*, the *mundus imaginalis* that Corbin was to unveil in Iranian-Islamic gnosis, is also a world of coincidence between two orders of reality: the sensible and the intelligible, where the spirit becomes embodied, as it were, and where bodies become spiritualised. Undoubtedly, the categories of this world did not correspond exactly to those revealed by Cassirer, but they nevertheless pointed to the existence of a scale of being where qualitative times and spaces differ according to levels of presence.

It was in the spring of 1934 that Corbin paid his first visit to Heidegger in Freiburg. There he sketched out the plan for the collection of essays that would be published under the title *Qu'est-ce que la Métaphysique ?*. He was then granted a secondment that allowed him to spend the 1935–1936 academic year in Berlin at the *Französisches Akademikerhaus*, whose director, Henri Jourdan, was a friend of his. He made another visit to Freiburg in July 1936 to discuss with Heidegger some translation difficulties, but, he adds, 'he placed his complete trust in me, approved all my French neologisms and left me with a somewhat heavy responsibility '[20].

As for the influence of Heidegger's thought on Corbin, we shall discuss this in greater detail in the following paragraph. Suffice it to say here that Corbin did not turn to spiritual Islam because he had been disappointed by Heidegger's philosophy; rather, he was already an Orientalist prior to becoming acquainted with Heidegger's work. His first publications on Sohrawardî date from 1933 and 1935, whilst he had already obtained his diploma from the School of Oriental Languages in 1929; his translation of Heidegger appeared in 1938. Corbin pursued his research on two fronts, his encounter with German thought closely following his encounter with the Iranian world. But if he did not close himself off to other influences even as his destiny seemed to be sealed, the reason is that Corbin always remained a Westerner, a restless thinker keen to understand the great movements that shook the first half of the 20th century. Even in Istanbul, Mrs Corbin asserts, whilst he had completely isolated himself from the rest of the world, immersed as he was in the work of Sohrawardî, he continued to translate **Sein und Zeit**, whilst also taking advantage of his time in Constantinople to deepen his knowledge of Greek and Russian Orthodox theology; it was at this time that he undertook a translation of Father Bulgakov's ** (21) .

According to Habermas, interwar Germany was[22] a fertile breeding ground for several philosophical currents whose influence was to be felt far beyond Germany's borders, extending into the post-war 1950s and 1960s. 1) With Husserl and Heidegger, there is a phenomenology oriented partly towards transcendental logic and partly towards fundamental ontology; 2) with Jaspers, Litt and Spranger, there is a *Lebensphilosophie* tracing back to Dilthey, at times tinged with existentialism, at times with neo-Hegelianism; 3) with Scheler and Plessner, and perhaps

along with Cassirer, a philosophical anthropology that seeks to lay the foundations for a philosophy of the Spirit, distinguishing humankind from the rest of nature; 4) there is, with Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin, Korsch and Horkheimer, a critical social philosophy seeking to return to Marx and Hegel; 5) finally, there is, with Wittgenstein, Carnap and Popper, logical positivism inspired by the Vienna Circle. To these five currents one might add the revival of Protestantism, with theological research centred on the thought of the young Luther, and also the developments of Freud's depth psychology in German-speaking countries, which, with Carl Gustav Jung in Switzerland, took on a more general character likely to interest historians of religion. Corbin took an interest in phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, the German historical school and the revival of Protestantism, but his primary concern remained the *res religiosa* as a 'general theory of religions'. Social philosophy and sociology remained on the periphery of his philosophical concerns. For, as we shall see in the conclusion of this book, Corbin takes a rather negative view of the historical development of Western thought. It is with the eye of a spiritual thinker that Corbin criticises the reductive rationalism of our time, setting against the instrumentalised reason of *the Aufklärung* the Gnostic content of *Vernunft*, to the theophany of Docetist forms as opposed to incarnation leading to social collectivisation, to the hiero-history of the Events in Heaven as opposed to historicism, to the polyvalence of symbols as opposed to allegory, and to apophatic theology as opposed to the nihilism of our century. But this does not prompt him to distance himself from the liberating movement of extra-philosophical currents sweeping through interwar Europe; that is to say, the effort of the great thinkers to attempt a perilous leap across the abyss of Nothingness: thus Heidegger's heroic plunge into the forgotten depths of Being to think there what remains unthought by the concealment of Being; just as Jaspers' leap to rediscover philosophical faith, and Berdiaev's eschatological philosophy to rediscover the unheard-of richness of the inner man.

Unlike Guénon, Corbin does not remain trapped within an anti-Western system, seeing in it nothing but the work of the Evil One. He does not resist intellectual currents.

On the contrary, he remains a philosopher insofar as he rethinks Being and subjects it to fundamental questioning. 'What does it mean for us to philosophise?' he asks right at the start of his career as a thinker. And the entire course of his thought will be an answer to this fundamental question. To listen is to let the Other speak, regardless of whether that Other is the Holy Spirit, the Angel or the Youth of the Persian visionary tales. To think is to engage in dialogue within the secret alcove of the heart; to think is to respond to the Call that ceaselessly summons us. One might say that every *turning point* in the course of his life inevitably leads towards this encounter with the Angel, whose manifold metamorphoses he traces among the great spiritual figures of both the West and the East. Corbin might well have made his own this remark by Heidegger, commenting on Nietzsche's famous phrase: 'God is dead': 'To think of God as a value, even the highest, is not God… Therefore God is not dead; his divinity (*Gottheit*) still lives, since it is closer to thought than to faith'[23] . " Corbin never tired of reflecting on the phenomenon of faith, and it was because he was a remarkable thinker that he was also able to trace and recreate, from its living sources, the entire immense heritage of the Iranian-Islamic tradition, a feat which an Iranian – let us say it frankly – could not have accomplished, because he would not have had the necessary distance that would have allowed him precisely to review the genesis of his own tradition from a broader perspective. If Corbin managed to achieve such a feat, it was because he was, in addition to being a spiritual figure, a thinker well-versed in Western philosophical disciplines and initiated into a number of leading schools of thought which, in the interwar period, were revolutionising the traditional landscape of thought in Europe. Throughout the years (from 1960 onwards) when I had the opportunity to meet him regularly in Tehran, I was surprised to note the keen interest with which he followed the events of our time: whether it was Solzhenitsyn's revelatory work, or the

a novel by Bulgakov or even Raymond Ruyer's *Princeton Gnosis*. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of our venerable Shaykhs, who remained on the sidelines of history, isolated in their scholastic ivory tower, frozen in some enchanted solitude that rendered them almost impervious to—and thereby vulnerable to—any new ideas.

But let us return to the stages of Corbin's life. As early as August 1944, Corbin received in Istanbul—where he had been since the outbreak of hostilities—a mission order for Persia from what was still the 'Government of Algiers'. In 1945 he set off for Iran, taking the train
"strategic" route as far as Baghdad, then drove up through the Zagros Mountains. And there lies the exhilaration of Iran's high plateaus beneath a turquoise sky. The few pages Corbin devoted to Isfahan show just how deeply he appreciated the beauty of the Persian landscape and art. He speaks of the 'emerald vision', of the mirror effect found both in the finely carved niches of the music room at Ali Qapu Palace in Isfahan and on the 'water mirror reflecting both the celestial dome, which is the true dome of *the templum*, and the polychrome tiles covering the surfaces24 ". Iran is the land where Heaven and Earth meet. And the phenomenon of the mirror, which lies at the heart of Iranian mosque architecture, also underpins the metaphysics of *the Image* espoused by a whole lineage of visionary philosophers. There is thus an inner connection between the various forms of the Iranian worldview, a *Gestalt* whose epiphany can be traced both in architecture and in the qualitative space of miniatures, for 'all their images are apparitions in a mirror, on the shimmering surface of a wall or the page of a book25'. Isfahan is an emblematic city: "To come to Isfahan is to come to the Royal Mosque as the place where the imaginal universe of Hûrqalyâ, the highest of the 'emerald cities', meets the architectural marvel perceived by the senses. It will also mean coming to the home of the Ishrâqîyân philosophers, whose metaphysics of the imagination makes this encounter possible, because it opens up the interworld to us, that intermediary realm between the purely intelligible and the sensible[26] ."

As I have already mentioned, Corbin was extremely sensitive to the topography of Iran; he saw it as the earthly and tangible form of *the mundus imaginalis*. I remember a trip we took together to Isfahan. We were sitting in the small breakfast room of the Shah-Abbas Hotel, which rather clumsily replicated the small empty niches of the music room in Ali Qapu Palace. Countless silhouettes of vases, flasks, needle cases and cups of every shape conceivable by a boundless imagination had been cut out of the empty space in the walls and partitions. This gave these spaces a sense of levitation, the feeling that everything there is suspended, that everything seems to be an apparition liable to vanish like a dream. I saw Corbin rise, his eyes illuminated by a kind of inner gaze, then he took me by the arm and, leading me towards one of the empty niches, said to me in a soft, almost sensual voice: 'This is the phenomenon of the mirror; reach your hand into this void and you will not touch the form; for the form is not there: it is elsewhere, elsewhere…'

If I mention this anecdotal detail, it is to convey just how much the discovery of Iran was a revelation of what he already carried within him. All the descriptions he gives of Persia bear witness to this intuitive vision that reads beyond the Images, that discovers metaphysical Essences beyond appearances. Corbin's marriage to Iran was a stellar predestination. Never have I seen a man live and feel so deeply what the eyes of the Spirit revealed to him. If it is said of Dostoevsky that he lived his ideas, one might say of Corbin that he transmuted his ideas into images. In all his reflections on things in Iran (I often travelled with him and can therefore bear witness to this), there was a kind of natural *ta'wîl*. He was born with an innate gift for hermeneutics; Iran was merely a testing ground for his alchemist's gaze. But he also had the gift of communication. The places we discovered with him were no longer the same; the objects we saw again through his eyes

shone through in the aura of a new presence: everything was transformed by his gaze, rising to a higher plane of being. This prompted me to describe him in a short article I wrote about him, as 'the man with the magic lamp e[27] '.

Corbin therefore arrived in Tehran on 14 September 1945. Among the illustrious figures he was to meet upon his arrival was Professor Pour Dâwûd, the translator of *the Avesta* into Persian. At the time, Pour Dâwûd hosted gatherings at his home attended by the elite of Tehran, such as the writer Sâdegh Hedâyat (author of *The Blind Owl*), Professor Mohammad Mo'în, Corbin's future collaborator on the edition of Persian texts, and Mehdî Bayânî, curator at the National Library. The latter organised a lecture for Corbin at the Society of Iranian Studies (*Anjoman-e Irân shenâsî*) on[1]November 1945. The theme of the lecture was *'Zoroastrian motifs in the philosophy of Shaykh al-Ishrâ q* [28]'. This lecture caused a sensation; it marked, so to speak, Corbin's triumphant entry into the intellectual world of Iran.

The aim of Corbin's mission was to put into practice 'long-term projects and far-reaching ideas', as he himself put it[29]. And so he established the Department of Iranian Studies at the Institut français and the Iranian Library collection, which would later become a significant cultural phenomenon in the philosophical history of contemporary Iran. At this stage, Corbin set about implementing the project that had taken root in his mind whilst he was a philosophy student attending Gilson's lectures at the Sorbonne. This immediate task consisted, he said, 'of gathering the material, setting up a study, and beginning to publish. Working conditions in Tehran were not what they are today (…), where one finds large collections of manuscripts equipped with catalogues. It was a matter of luck; it is true that luck usually favours the persistent researcher. I began publishing the Bibliothèque iranienne, and over the course of twenty-five years, with the help of a few collaborators, was able to bring it up to the twenty-second volume. Each volume, produced entirely on site, required a minor feat of strength. The collection was essentially a collection of unpublished texts, in Persian or Arabic (…). I believe that this collection, the volumes of which are now almost all out of print, has succeeded in blazing a trail e[30] ».

In saying that this collection 'made a significant impact', Corbin is probably being very modest. Indeed this collection combined two disciplines rarely found in a single individual: the scientific rigour of the philologist and the Orientalist as such, and the depth of the philosopher who, whilst reading the texts, assimilates them magically, that is to say, reveals their hidden esoteric meanings. The transition from the National Library to the Iranian Library[31] was more than a mere continuation over time; the thread linking the two points marks a transformation from one to the other; whilst the former represented membership of a venerable institution, the latter refers rather "to the personal realisation of a scholarly collection"[32] .

From the 1960s onwards, a group of young researchers gathered around Corbin, of which I myself was a member. If I speak of myself here, it is because I was an eyewitness to Corbin's activities for over seventeen years, right up until his death. Not only did he influence my research and guide the direction of my studies—as he was my doctoral supervisor—but he was also the driving force behind a spiritual movement that sought to build a bridge between traditional Iran and modernity. I was not an Islamic scholar, but *an Indologist* by training; my encounter with Corbin sparked my interest in *religion* and the phenomena of the spirit, regardless of whether these were expressed in the mythological language of Indian thought or took the imaginative forms of Iranian-Islamic gnosis, for, I told myself, does not the philosopher pursue his quest

wherever the spirit breathes?

Indeed, there was a cultural and sociological divide in Iran between two worlds that remained strictly separated from one another: the Shia Iran of Qom, with its theological schools, and the modern Iran that was industrialising at a frenetic pace. Between the two, there were groups of intellectuals opposed to one another by ideological choices, and amidst these various groups, a host of young Iranians who had studied abroad (the United States, France, Switzerland), had encountered Guénon's work, discovered the tradition, and returned home eager to delve deeper into this tradition, which seemed to them a lifeline in the turbulent ocean of modern upheavals. On the other hand, the theologians of Qom were chiefly doctors of the Law, and among them, those interested in spiritual Islam wrote either in Arabic or in scholastic Persian, which was inaccessible to the young. Consequently, the prodigious riches of the Iranian philosophical tradition remained beyond the reach of the young. A large part of Iran's intelligentsia, influenced by the Marxist vulgate and the by-products of the West, had access neither to the treasures of tradition nor to the great creations of Western culture; it remained in a vacuum, unable to move beyond the social stage of ideological debates. By contrast, for this host of young researchers, Corbin's work was a revelation; not only did it translate the great, privileged moments of Iranian thought into clear, conceptual language, but, in doing so, the old ideas appeared clothed in a new and dazzling garb: sequences followed one another, rare gems sprang from the jumble of a worm-eaten scholastic world, the Iranian universe was paradoxically resurrected in the clear language of Descartes; and, transformed into elegant French, these ideas were almost modernised. Thus a Pilgrim from the West came to Iran to reveal to young Persians, in French, the wonders accumulated by their illustrious ancestors. This is one of the incredible paradoxes of our time. Moreover, the fact that Corbin's work attracted these young minds was due not only to the language but also to the spirit with which Corbin reinterpreted this tradition. I remember once asking my friend Sayyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî (Corbin's collaborator on the famous *Anthology*): 'Why don't you write a history of Iranian-Islamic philosophy, highlighting its key moments and the genetic link connecting the ideas?' He looked at me for a long time, then made this remark, which impressed me greatly: 'I am incapable of viewing philosophical thought from a distance; I have no suitable *method* for this kind of research; in a way, I embody this philosophy.' ' A courageous admission of helplessness, yet also a sign of lucidity, for Ashtiyânî understood perfectly the inescapable necessity of this vital task; that is why he welcomed with open arms the proposal Corbin later made to him to create an anthology of the great Iranian thinkers.

Whilst Ashtiyânî was unable to take a step back from his own tradition, such detachment came almost naturally to Corbin: objectivity, detachment, criticism and analysis were inherent characteristics of the Western perspective. Moreover, Corbin, apart from being French—that is to say, a European (I have rarely met a man who was so European in the humanist sense of the term)—had a marvellous grasp of the entire apparatus of Western medieval and modern philosophy. He had felt in his very being the ruptures between faith and knowledge, theology and philosophy; he had experienced the torments of secularisation, weathered the drama of the 'death of God', and it was to rediscover the Word of the Divine from the depths of distress that he had become a pilgrim of the West. Hence the modern tone of his voice, the *pathos* of his Quest, which spoke directly to anyone anxious to heed the imperatives of the Spirit.

Without having set out to do so, Corbin had become the bridge between Sohrawardi's Iran and Heidegger's West. And it was this dual dimension of his thought that enabled us, the young researchers gathered around him, to explore this connection in greater depth. With him, we did not feel

in the closed, geocentric constellation of a pre-Galilean universe, but very much in the modern age; through his guidance, we learnt to engage in dialogue with the great giants of Western culture: Meister Eckhart, Jacob Böhme, Hegel, Wagner and *Parsifal* (whom Corbin greatly admired), Berdiaev, Blake, Rilke, Heidegger, Jung and so many others.

In the 1960s, we were a very small group: Sayyed Hosayn Nasr, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Tehran, Issâ Sepahbodî, a professor of French, Houshang Beshârat, a diplomat at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and myself, a professor of Indology at the University of Tehran, would gather in the garden of Zolmajd Tabâtabâ'î, a renowned lawyer and patron of the arts with a passion for philosophy, who regularly hosted eminent shaykhs of traditional philosophy, and above all the famous Sayyed Mohammad Hosayn Tabâtabâ'î, professor of philosophy in Qom and one of the greatest commentators on the Qur'an. It was there, in the very early 1960s, that I met Corbin for the first time. I shall take the liberty of reproducing here what I have already said elsewhere on this subject t[33] .

'It was in Tehran, on a cool late-summer evening in Zolmajd Tabâtabâ'î's garden. We were a
A small group sat in the clearing of a garden surrounded by tall cypress trees, cooled by the spray from a fountain cascading onto the surface of a cross-shaped pond. The almost magical atmosphere associated with that first encounter became a landmark in my memory, and it is, surrounded by the halo of that first memory, that the image of the man who was to have such a profound impact on my life always appears to me.

"The guests of honour that evening were two figures from the West and the East: the Frenchman Henry Corbin and an Iranian, Shaykh Mohammad Hosayn Tabâtabâ'î (…). So what did we talk about that evening? The major themes of speculative gnosis that were to occupy us throughout that year, as well as the following year, and for the fifteen years that followed that first meeting; themes of unprecedented richness relating to the fundamental problems that have never ceased to trouble mankind since time immemorial. That evening, I recall, Corbin broached the subject of original sin and the Fall of Man and, placing them within the context of Christianity, asked the Shaykh: "Does Islamic gnosis also acknowledge original sin?", then, quoting a French author whose name I have forgotten, added: "Two thousand years of original sin have ultimately turned you into complacent sinners." I do not even know if my quotation is accurate, but the fact remains that this sentence struck me deeply. The Shaykh's voice was so low that one could barely hear him, and murmuring as if to himself, he replied: "The Fall is not a lack, nor a defect, much less a sin: had it not been for the forbidden fruit of the tree, the inexhaustible possibilities of Being would never have manifested themselves." I shall never forget Corbin's approving smile; that innocent smile which directly conveyed to you the spontaneity of a generous thought. "It is because the West has lost the sense of *ta'wîl*," said Corbin, "that we can no longer penetrate the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and that we demythologise the sacred dimension of the world." It was the first time I had grasped the full, unsuspected scope of this term that Corbin often used and which remained, as we know, the keystone of his entire meditation. "Can one," remarked the Shaykh, "speak of such things without taking *ta'wîl* (spiritual hermeneutics) into account? There can be no true spirituality without ta'wîl." The agreement between the two men, despite the difficulties of spoken dialogue (the Shaykh spoke very softly, with an Azari accent to boot; Corbin could barely hear him), was complete. It was only later that I came to realise the immense possibilities of this "concept" and the implications it suggested. I understood, then, that Corbin's entire life was, in a sense, an effort directed towards the blossoming of the art of *ta'wîl*, that is to say, of *meditative thought* par excellence, of which he had already discovered certain aspects in the phenomenological method. But what appeared to be a late discovery in the development of Western thought, with Husserl and Heidegger, had been for Iranian thinkers the indispensable key to all meditation. "That is what sums it up so well," Corbin told me,

“the expression *‘kashf al-mahjûb*’, that is to say, the unveiling of the hidden.”

These meetings continued even after Corbin’s departure. And it was inspired by Corbin’s spirit of synthesis that, for two years, we undertook with Shaykh Tabâtabâ’î—who had in the meantime become a very close friend—a unique experience in Iran: the comparative study of the world’s various religions under the guidance of a traditional Shia shaykh. We took turns reading translations of the Gospels, the Persian version of the Upanishads translated by Dârâ Shokûh, the Buddhist Sûtras, and the Tao Te Ching; a book that Nasr and I had hastily translated and which we read through with the Shaykh. He commented on the texts with the insight of a spiritual master equally at home in Hindu thought as in the Buddhist and Chinese worlds. He never saw any fundamental opposition to the spirit of Islamic gnosis as he had known and practised it. Everywhere he saw the great moments of the Spirit, and when we had finished reading the dizzying and so prodigiously paradoxical thought of Lao Tzu, he pointed out to us that of all the texts we had read with him, this one was by far the deepest, the purest. Subsequently, he asked us on numerous occasions for a translation of this text, but unfortunately the text and the notes I had taken during those meetings had all been lost in a fire that ravaged my library on 25 December 1963. Neither Nasr nor I ever had the courage to undertake a new translation.

In 1954, Corbin succeeded Louis Massignon in the Department of Religious Studies at the École pratique des hautes études. Regarding this appointment, Corbin remarked: ‘Dear Massignon was no stranger to this election. I was aware of his concern, and whatever our differences of opinion, he regarded me as the person closest to him to continue the direction he had given to the research, if not in terms of its content, then at least in terms of its meaning and spirit t[34] .”

Another event of crucial importance was also to shape the course of Henry’s life
Corbin: his involvement with the Eranos Circle. It was in 1949 that Corbin received an invitation from Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn to take part in the conferences, the theme of which that year was **Der Mensch und die mythische Welt** (Man and the Mythical World). Corbin’s first contribution to Eranos was entitled ‘The Initiation Narrative and Hermeticism in Iran (Angelic Research)’. His involvement lasted for a quarter of a century. Over the years, Corbin became one of the pillars of this rather exclusive circle. There he met Carl Gustav Jung, who was in a sense its ‘guardian genius’, Karl Kérenyi, Mircea Eliade, Adolph Portmann, the scholar and biologist, Gerhard van der Leeuw, the Dutch phenomenologist of the *res religiosa*, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, the master of Zen Buddhism, Ernst Benz, the theologian from Marburg, Gilbert Durand, James Hillman and Gershom Scholem, Toshihiko Izutsu, the Japanese Islamologist who was also a master of Buddhism, and many other illustrious figures.

All ecclesiastical, academic and university orthodoxy remained alien to the spirit of Eranos. Each participant made their contribution as if in a laboratory, where they presented the first outline of a new line of research. “Almost all these essays,” said Corbin, “were turned into books.” Corbin himself sketched out the major themes of his books there, which were later published under different titles, such as *The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabî* and the monumental four-volume *magnum opus On Iranian Islam*, to name but a few examples.

Through Corbin’s transformative gaze, everything took on symbolic meaning, and it was in this same spirit that he wrote two short articles entitled **From Iran to Eranos** (1953) and *The *Time of Eranos** (1956). The link uniting Iran with Eranos was not a fortuitous assonance, “but a complicity, inviting us to savour the secret forethought that prepared the stages curving the route of a single pilgrimage ”[35] Here it was Rudolf Otto who served as the synchronic link. It was indeed he who, back in 1933, had proposed to Mrs Fröbe-Kapteyn, who was passing through Marburg, the meaning, form and name of the Eranos project, of which he became, if you will, the *guiding spirit*. In 1930, Corbin was also in Marburg, as was a young

a Japanese Buddhist, a follower of the Pure Land of Sukhavati, who had made his way to Rudolf Otto, following in the footsteps of Luther, that 'Buddha of the West', because the great German theologian's doctrine of redemption by grace awakened in him the Compassion of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. However, Corbin notes, Iran, the land of Fravarti (Angel) and the Pure Land, also embodied this same reality "For at the origins of the celestial Earth, in infinite light, blazes the Light of Sacred Glory, the *Xvarnah* of Iranian hierophanies." And it was at Eranos that Corbin, initiated into the Iranian vision of the Archangels of Light, regularly made his contribution. From then on, all these sequences, unconnected by causality – R. Otto, author of a comparative study on the mystics of East and West (Sankara and Meister Eckhart), the Pure Land of Sukhavati, Iran, land of the Fravartis and the *Xvarnah* – came together *synchronously* across time and space, and this outside of any causal connection, to create the specific configuration of what Corbin called the 'time of Eranos'; a time that was the 'bringing into presence' of events constellated as signs. Eranos thus became the centre of signs. To come to Eranos was to interpret the connotations of these signs, "because," says Corbin, "Eranos is itself a *sign*. It cannot and will not be understood unless it is interpreted as a *sign*, that is to say, as a presence constantly and each time bringing things 'into the present'. It *is* its own time because it brings things into the present, just as every acting subject *is* its own time, that is to say a presence that brings into the present everything that relates to it[36] ".

The Eranos Circle also tells the story of a special friendship: that between Jung and Corbin. One must have made the pilgrimage to Ascona to realise just how much the spirit of the 'Mage of Zurich' is present in these surroundings. Here is what Corbin himself had to say: 'The meetings with Carl Gustav Jung were unforgettable. We had long conversations in Ascona, in Küssnacht, in Bollingen, in his castle, where my friend Carl-Alfred Meier would take me. What can I say about these conversations, regarding which I wish to leave no room for ambiguity? I was a metaphysician, not a psychologist; Jung was a psychologist, not a metaphysician, though he often dabbled in metaphysics. Our respective backgrounds and aims were entirely different, and yet we understood one another throughout our conversations, to such an extent that, when his **Answer to* Job* appeared—a work savagely torn apart by all sides of the religious spectrum—I wished to offer a fair interpretation of it in a long article e[37] which earned me his friendship. This article made him, in a sense, an interpreter of *Sophia* and of sophiology. Dare I say that Jung's teaching and conversation could offer any metaphysician, any theologian, an invaluable gift, provided one knew when to step away? I am thinking of André Gide's precept: 'Now, Nathanaël, throw my book away… '[38] ."

> This which captivated Corbin in the psychology of Jung, it is that this dared to utter

"courageously uses the 'word soul' and sets man on a journey of discovery of his soul e[39] ". Jung's thought differs from the phenomenology of historical consciousness prevalent since Hegel in that it continually reveals the *prehistory* of the soul, so that the latter is not consigned to an outdated past but is always present 'at the beginning ' [40]. Jung's significance lies in having revealed the symbolic language of this *prehistory*, in having distinguished it from allegory, and above all in having linked the symbol to the structures of the soul itself. Symbols are therefore the crystallisation of archetypes, which are themselves the 'organs of the pre-rational psyche'. In itself, the archetype has no content; it is invisible and can be compared to the magnetic field of a magnet t[41]; and when it manifests itself, it does so in the form of a symbol. It follows, therefore, that the symbol is the visible form of an invisible archetype. Thus stripped of their psychological content, archetypes can be compared to the Divine Ideas, to *the Imago Dei*, to the 'Fixed Essences' (Islamic gnosis); in short, to all the archetypal forms assumed by the theophanies of the Spirit.

But the exegesis of the soul and the encounter with the primordial Archetype is, for those who experience it as a numinous event, a process of individuation, in which the *ego* is, in a sense, integrated into the Unconscious as *a hierosgamos*, the fruit of which is, for example, in the context of Christianity, the birth of the divine child. Jung, in an article published in Erano s[42], defines *individuation* as the experience of the Self, which in a sense becomes the centre of this integration. The Self is not the central point but the circumference that encompasses both the unconscious and the conscious; it is the centre of this totality just as the ego is the centre of the conscious. Jung refers to this integration as the 'symbolism of the mandala' (*Mandalasymbolik*). The *mandala* is thus the symbol of the Self (*das Selbst*) in the process of individuation, and this constitutes the union of opposites and the creation of the archetypal body (the *incorruptible corpus* of alchemy). One of Jung's disciples, Erich Neumann, taking up the same theme in a lecture on 'the mystical man[43]', equates the experience of the Self with the encounter with 'the creative point of Nothingness' (*der schöpferische Punkt des Nichts*), which is the numinous experience. Through this encounter, the two poles of our total being brought face to face—that is, the Self and the non-Self—are transmuted to form, as it were, a third entity revealed to the mystic by the metaphysical equation "That thou art" (*tat tvam asi*). The *'That'* of this fundamental equation, whilst being the annihilating centre of Nothingness, is nonetheless the founding point of the circumference of Being. Consequently, this experience is, in relation to the Self that annihilates itself, an annihilation; but in relation to the Totality that emerges from it, it is the Self, that is to say, the *temenos*, the initial and configurative structure of *the mandala*: 'where mystical theology and mystical anthropology become one and the same thing e[44]'; where, finally, according to Islamic mystics, the end point of the Ascent meets the starting point of the Descent[45] . Yet the experience of the Self, as Individuation, suggested to Corbin—without, however, being confused with it—the phenomenon of the Encounter with the Angel, whose multiple examples he traced in Iranian-Islamic gnosis. The mystical experience, whether that of the prophet or the Gnostic philosopher, could only take place through the transforming presence of the Angel as an inner guide. The progression of the journey for both is therefore the result of an angelic pedagogy which is internally expressed through the encounter with the Angel-Self. This inner guide may take on different names and appear at times as the Archangel Gabriel, at times as Perfect Nature (Sohrawardî and the Hermetic tradition), at times as the Celestial Partner (Gnostic tradition), and at times as the Hero of Avicenna's visionary tales, Hayy ibn Yaqzân. But whatever form the Angel may choose to take, its pedagogical function remains the same: to awaken the soul as a Stranger in this world and to bring about the union of the soul's duality with its celestial Alter-Ego. It is thus the dual aspect of this union that creates Individuation and brings about the blossoming of the polar dimension of being, through which the soul's celestial counterpart manifests itself to the mystic *in singularibus*.

In defining the experience of the Self, Corbin argues that Jung valued *the* inner *Imago* and the primordial language of the symbol over 'the dissolution of the soul to which Freud's psychoanalysis, the laboratories of psychology, and so many other inventions—in which our agnostic world is so prolific—gladly lead e[46] '. Unfortunately, only the collective unconscious was retained from Jung, whilst the process of individuation—which remained the central theme of all his work on alchemy—was neglected. This process, moreover, revealed the 'world of subtle bodies', whose ontological foundation Corbin had unveiled in Iranian-Islamic thought: namely, the world of *Archetypal Images ('âlam al-mithâl*), the *malakût* of the soul where bodies become spiritualised and spirits take corporeal form. However, it is here that, if I may say so, the essential difference inherent in the psychological and metaphysical methods of Jung and Corbin comes into play. In order to distinguish itself from the Imaginary, this *mundus imaginalis* required its own autonomous ontological foundation. Yet, according to Corbin, 'it lacks

'… yet it is the Western psychologist who must possess this foundation or metaphysical framework that ontologically underpins the function of this mediating world[47]…'. For in the absence of a cosmological and ontological foundation, that world is liable to degenerate into disturbances of the imagination. This is why Corbin coined the term *'imaginal'* to distinguish it clearly from the 'imaginary'. *The imaginal*, let us reiterate, has reality only if it is carefully framed within a cosmological and Platonic vision of the world in which the inner realities of man have ontological counterparts in the external world, and the passage from one to the other – that is, from the time of horizons (*âfâqî*) to the inner time of the soul (*anfosî*) – takes place through a rupture that is also a reversal, or even a *ta'wîl*. In the absence of this Gnostic experience, *the imaginal* is highly likely to degenerate into imaginary delusions. It is therefore a full-scale battle for the soul of the world that must be waged, says Corbin, and in this context 'Jungian psychology can very appropriately prepare the ground for the battle, but the victorious outcome of the battle depends on weapons other than those of psychology[48]'.

To conclude this introduction, we must now turn to the final significant moments of this spiritual biography. It was during the autumn of 1964 in Tehran that, together with his colleague and friend Sayyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî (a professor at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Mashhad) Corbin conceived the project of undertaking one of the great, as yet unfinished tasks of his life: the compilation of a vast *Anthology of Iranian philosophers from the 17th century to the present day*, beginning with Mîr Dâmâd, the leading thinker of the Isfahan School, at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. The aim was to present some forty or fifty thinkers, whose names had not been forgotten, but whose works remained difficult to access and virtually unknown to the rest of the world. Initially, they planned for five volumes, but then realised that six or seven would be needed. The first volume appeared in 1971, the second in 1975; the third was completed and the fourth was nearing completion. Unfortunately, Corbin did not have time to finish this corpus, but he had, however, intended to bring together the French sections in a separate volume. This volume was published after Corbin's death under the title *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* by Buchet-Chastel in 1981. As for the friendship between Corbin and Ashtiyânî, it was excellent; Ashtiyânî had unreserved admiration for Corbin. I remember that in the autumn of 1977, he came to stay with me for a few days. The flat I had set aside for him overlooked a garden, and there we would gaze upon the first signs of autumn and, in the distance, the magical Alborz mountain range, which cast the dream of the heights over the vast expanses of the desert. Conversing with Ashtiyânî was often an unforgettable privilege; he had a gift for whisking you away on wings towards invisible horizons and unexplored spaces. One day he asked me to translate for him a few pages that Corbin had devoted to Mulla Sadra Shirazi. I gave a free, paraphrased translation as best I could, trying to transpose into Persian what had been so masterfully interpreted in French. Ashtiyânî was literally enchanted; Sadrâ's thought revealed, thanks to the transformation Corbin had wrought upon it, a fresh appeal, a contemporary tone. He listened in silence and then said to me: 'He has truly grasped the essence of his thought.'

When, in 1973, Corbin reached, as he himself put it, the 'limit of his years', and consequently had to give up his regular stays in Iran, a
the "Iranian Imperial Academy of Philosophy", headed by his friend and colleague Sayyed Hosayn Nasr, who immediately welcomed him as a member. The programme for his stay therefore remained unchanged. Corbin was able to visit Iran regularly, to continue his research there and to give lectures at the Academy. Furthermore, an 'Iranian Centre for the Study of Civilisations' had just been founded in Tehran in 1977, which I myself was directing. Corbin now had a choice: everyone was ready to welcome him with open arms into their institution. His young friends were now heading research institutes following in the footsteps he had so patiently blazed. When, in the autumn of 1977, I wanted to

When I organised an international symposium in Tehran on the theme *'Does the influence of Western thought make genuine dialogue between civilisations possible?*', I turned to him for help, and he became, in a sense, its *guiding spirit*. The symposium revolved around his charismatic personality and served as a magnificent tribute to the man who had done so much for Iran and its culture. Sadly, this was Corbin's last visit to Iran, and I am glad that it was crowned with success and glory; for he greatly appreciated the marks of respect and friendship shown to him by everyone, from the highest to the humblest. Corbin's contribution to the symposium, *'Apophatic Theology as an Antidote to Nihilism'*, went straight to the heart of the debate and, as always, raised the issue to the level of the mind. The two names most frequently mentioned during the discussions that followed were those of Corbin and Heidegger. A great cycle was thus coming to an end; Heidegger's quest in Sohrawardî found its resolution and its apotheosis there. And in his closing remarks, Corbin summed up the spirit of the symposium as follows:

"For the first time at a conference such as ours, I have heard Western philosophers and traditional Iranian philosophers cited side by side. For a researcher who was initially driven by the conviction that this Iranian philosophy held a spiritual treasure and that it was worth devoting a lifetime's work to its revival, this is a deeply reward[49] ."

It was during a stopover in Paris on my way home that I saw Corbin for the last time in September 1978. I had just returned from a mission in Latin America. Corbin was lying in bed, unwell and somewhat concerned about the course of events in Iran, for the Iranian Revolution had well and truly begun. I cannot tell you how happy we were to see each other again; I kissed him and sat down at the foot of his bed. "What on earth is happening in Iran, my little Daryush?" I had no idea myself. My forty-day absence had completely cut me off from the events that had, in the meantime, taken on a frenetic pace. The few snippets of information I'd managed to gather from the Mexican and Peruvian press didn't tell me any more. I don't know what I said to him, I was so moved. As I left, I had tears in my eyes because I knew I'd never see him again. In the taxi taking me to the airport, I had a dark foreboding. I knew that Corbin's imminent death heralded the end of a world, that the country 'the colour of the sky', the homeland of poets and philosophers, was teetering on the brink of an abyss and would soon experience one of the darkest chapters in its history. Even now, looking back nearly ten years later, I feel the same anguish as I relive those intense moments. And now, as I write these lines and think of my departed friend, I hear his voice telling me of 'a world where love must precede all knowledge, where the meaning of death would be nothing but a longing for resurrection'.

CHAPTER II
Hermeneutics and Heidegger

Heidegger's shift towards Sohrawardî has been much discussed: it has been interpreted as a sign of disappointment, a disparity, and even an incongruous mixture. Corbin explained this clearly in his interview with Philippe Nemo: 'What I was seeking in Heidegger, what I understood thanks to Heidegger, is precisely what I was seeking and found in Iranian-Islamic metaphysics' (50) . " What Corbin found in Iranian thinkers was, in a sense, another "climate of Being" (*eqlîm-e wojûd*, Hâfez), another level of presence, a level that was, so to speak, excluded from the programme of Heideggerian analytics. The "return to the things themselves" advocated by Husserl, the bracketing, and the withdrawal from accepted beliefs advocated by the followers of phenomenology, did not lead to the *lost continent* of the soul, any more than Heidegger, analysing the existentialia of *Dasein* and the structure of temporality, managed to reach this *eighth climate* or the world of *the imaginal*. Thus the transition from Heidegger to Sohrawardî was not merely an ordinary journey, much less an evolution, but a rupture—a rupture that marked the entry into another climate of being, and which bore its full fruit only when Corbin, isolated in Istanbul in the company of the Shaykh al-Ishrâq, gradually came to have an immediate vision of it.

Indeed, as we have already noted, the entire philosophical framework of the young Corbin revolves around two interrelated themes: hermeneutics and temporality. And for anyone interested in such matters, and who was a Germanist to boot, the originality of the Freiburg master's thought could not fail to make an impression. For Heidegger's immense merit, says Corbin, is 'to have centred the very act of philosophising on hermeneutics '[51]. On the other hand, the concept of hermeneutics has Protestant and Lutheran origins. From Luther to Hamann, to Scheiermacher (1768–1834), to Dilthey, to Barth, to Heidegger, the link in this hermeneutical tradition is evident. It is therefore not surprising to see Corbin following the milestones of this journey step by step. We see him grappling with the notion of *significatio passiva* in Luther, with Barth's dialectical theology of the call of the Other; we see him in the company of the Magus of the North and in contact with his 'prophetic philosophy', an idea which Corbin would later develop within Iranian-Islamic thought, where the identity of the Angel of Knowledge and the Active Intellect would provide him with the foundations for a prophetic philosophy. Here is Corbin grappling with the problem of temporality: the existential time of faith and the time of the Word of God, and underpinning these different modes of being, the corresponding hermeneutical levels. " 'What I found so enchanting in Heidegger,' he says, 'was, in short, the lineage of hermeneutics dating back to the theologian Scheiermacher, and if I claim to be a phenomenologist, it is because philosophical hermeneutics is essentially the key that unlocks the hidden meaning (etymologically, *the esoteric*) beneath exoteric statements. I have therefore merely continued to explore this further, first in the vast, unexplored domain of Shia Islamic gnosis, and then in the neighbouring regions of Christian and Jewish gnosis. Inevitably, partly because the concept of hermeneutics had a Heideggerian flavour, and partly because my early publications concerned the great Iranian philosopher Sohrawardî, certain 'historians' persisted in virtuously insinuating that I had conflated Heidegger with Sohrawardî. But using a key to open a lock is not the same as confusing the key with the lock. It is not

“It was not even a question of taking Heidegger as a key, but of making use of the key he himself had used, and which was available to everyon e [52].”

Whilst Corbin attended Gilson’s course on medieval philosophy, Heidegger continued his studies
He studied theology and then philosophy at the University of Freiburg and, in 1911, after four semesters of theology, decided to devote himself entirely to philosophy. In 1915, his habilitation thesis, dedicated to Rickert, was entitled: *_The Treatise on Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus_*. The sections of this work dealing with the *grammatica speculativa* would later help Corbin to apply Lutheran hermeneutics when he was called upon to stand in for his friend Alexandre Koyré in the Department of Religious Studies at the École des Hautes Études, during the years 1937–1939. There is also the Augustinian concept of time, where Corbin rediscovers the ‘brilliantly renewed’ schema in [Heidegger53] . Corbin is captivated by the hermeneutics of *_Sein und Zeit_*. What is the link connecting the signifier and the signified? It is *_Dasein_*, the Subject, which Corbin translated at the time as *‘human reality’ ’*. The Subject, as *human reality* or *Being-there* (as it would later be translated), realises a presence, constituting itself as *Da* (there); it is already being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*). Its being is the original condition that precisely makes the projection of a world possible. Its presence is not a uniform and continuous present in time, but it is itself as *a project*, a source of temporalisation. In other words, it generates its own time. Hence Heidegger’s definition: ‘the essence of human reality consists in its existence’ (*Das Wesen des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz*)[54] . Ex-sisting as an ex-static being, Dasein not only projects a world, but in so doing, explains it: its presence in the world, which it illuminates through its own presence in the world, is already understanding and interpretation (*Aus-legung*). Hence the importance for Corbin of the fact that Heidegger emphasised hermeneutics. Since its presence is revealing, it is also revealed, but ‘in such a way that, in revealing itself, it is itself that reveals itself, itself that is [revealed’55] . All existence, being an understanding, is thereby the articulation of a project (*Entwurf*) through which Dasein assumes, on the one hand, its original condition as a being thrown into an existence it has not chosen and anticipates, in advance, its ultimate power-to-be, that is to say, its future. Time originates from the future, and the future thus acquires a privilege over the other two temporal realms, namely the past and the present. Thus the fabric of Dasein is woven of historicity: “ The analysis of the historicity of human reality (Being-there) seeks to show that this existent (being) is not ‘temporal’ because it ‘is situated in History’, but that, on the contrary, if it exists and can exist only historically, it is because it is temporal at the very core of its [being56] .”

The three components of the three-dimensional structure of *Dasein*: facticity or dereliction
(*Befindlichkeit*, the fact of always being there), existence as presence and source of temporalisation, and being-with (*Sein bei*) constitute concern. This interprets the world as natural light. Man illuminates the world through a dual movement of retrospection and anticipation, such that concern, interpretation and temporalisation remain simultaneously original (*gleichursprünglich*) existentialia, linked to the very structure of *Dasein* and its identification with being-in-the-world.

These existentialia are, consequently, the modes of being or, if one will, the ontological, existential conditions of understanding, that is to say, of hermeneutics. This is the *clavis hermeneutica* that Heidegger’s work offered to Corbin: modes of being require their own mode of understanding; but for Corbin, who was seeking modes of being other than those postulated by the *Da* of the analytics of *Dasein*, the problem of hermeneutics was to extend beyond the horizon of the Heideggerian *Weltanschauung*. Corbin would use this same key to open other locks, notably those that lay outside Heidegger’s analytical programme; that is to say, other modes of being related to other levels

hermeneutics and other modes of temporalisation. The problem of *hiero-history*, of eschatology, of the imaginal space of symbols: all matters that lay largely outside the scope of Heideggerian thought, yet remained central concerns in Corbin's quest. Heidegger's hermeneutics, at least that of **Being and Time**, had the task of bringing to light the way in which **Da* reveals the horizon that is hidden from it. Around this **situs* (Heideggerian **Weltanschauung*) is thus organised

"the whole ambiguity of human finitude characterised as 'Being-towards-death' (*Sein zum Tode*)[57] "… whereas for Iranian mystics, such as Mulla Sadra, for example, the presence as revealed to them by the phenomenon of the world is no longer a presence whose finality is being-towards-death, but a being-towards-beyond-death, a *Sein zum Jenseits des Todes s*[58] . Consequently, the difference converges towards this *beyond*, which is the point of rupture: between this world and the beyond, the meaning of death changes completely. But what is the existential foundation of death in Heidegger?

He posits that Dasein exists in two fundamental modes: inauthentic existence, submerged in the everyday banality of the 'It' (*das Man*), preoccupied with distraction and evading its true possibilities; or in the mode of authenticity, which is a resolute existence seeking to live according to its own, unconditional and insurmountable possibilities. What distinguishes these two modes of existence is the attitude of Dasein towards death. The authentic attitude would therefore consist in not fleeing from this ultimate possibility that is inherent to it. Being-towards-death is grounded in anxiety, in the fact that Dasein, from the moment of its birth, is ripening towards its death. 'As soon as a human comes into life,' says Heidegger, quoting an old proverb, 'he is already old enough to [die](#) '[59]. Death is something that belongs to us alone, and no one can relieve another of their death[60]. It is an imminence that we always carry within us, possible at any moment and thereby indeterminate. It is therefore our 'absolutely own, unconditional, insurmountable' possibility and has its source in this act of anticipating oneself. But in the mode of inauthentic existence, Being-there is submerged in everyday banality; it is lost in the 'One', which is expressed, moreover, in idle chatter and *small talk s*[61] . We speak of it as something that will surely happen one day, but in the meantime it is the neighbour's turn, whilst we ourselves remain safe and sound. The fact of dying, says Heidegger, 'is thus reduced to the level of an event that certainly concerns human reality (Being-there), but does not affect anyone in their own right e[62]'. Thus this death, which is indeed my own, 'without any possible substitute', is now transformed into an event that belongs to the public domain. Death falls to the 'One', for it 'justifies and intensifies the *temptation* to conceal from oneself the being-for-death, that being absolutely possessed in one's own right e [63] '.

It is through death that Dasein forms a complete whole. To be-towards-death is therefore to accept death as possibility, it is the act of rushing ahead (*vorlaufen*) into ultimate possibility e[64]; it is also being attentive (*warten*) to its realisation. Consequently, Being-there can only be authentically itself on condition that it makes itself possible for death t[65]. For the anticipatory impulse, far from revealing itself before death, far from fleeing from the insurmountable and unconditional possibility that Being-there conceals, *makes* itself *free for death*[66] ; that is to say, free for its own death. This impulse prevents Being-there from falling behind itself; it leaves it alone before its destiny, offering it the possibility of existential anticipation, of total fulfilment in radical solitude:

"that is to say, the possibility of ex-sisting as *the power to form a Whole (ganzes Seinkönnen)*[67]."

Now, the *Stimmung* that in a sense awakens man and brings him face to face with Nothingness is anxiety. This is a retreat before… which is no longer a flight as in inauthentic existence where evasion translates into fear, but 'a repose and a fascinatio n[68] '. Anxiety is therefore essentially a repulsion; it reveals the essence of Nothingness contained within the very finitude of Being-there;

It is thus a process of annihilation. 'It is Nothingness itself that annihilates' (*das Nichts selbst nichtet*), says Heidegger[69]. Nothingness, by causing all existing things to slip, renders them precarious (*hinfällig*) and, by shaking them, reveals the solitude, strangeness and alienation of Being-there as radically-Other in the face of Nothingness t [70] . Thus held within Nothingness, man emerges from and beyond being, and this act of emergence is Transcendence. Hence this sentence by Heidegger, which brings to mind the category of the Sacred as developed by R. Otto: 'without the original manifestation of Nothingness, there would be neither personal being nor freedo é[71] '. And yet this original anxiety occurs only in rare moments; it is the privilege of a select few. It is thanks to this that, ultimately, Being-there, freed from the illusions of the On, annihilated by the anxiety that causes it to emerge beyond being as transcendence, achieves freedom for death, that is to say, the possibility of existing as a completed Whole[72] .

If, then, Being-towards-death achieves, through anxiety, an authentic existence—one that consists in embracing the ultimate possibility of its being and the power to form a complete Whole—this Whole nevertheless remains at the horizontal level of this world. Indeed, Heidegger states that 'the analysis of death remains purely confined to this world '[73]. Heideggerian transcendence pays little heed to the beyond (*Jenseits*); it does not effect a rupture with our plane of existence. It is concerned neither with the posthumous destiny of the soul, nor with eschatology, nor with apophatic theology, nor, finally, with resurrection. All these are things that Corbin finds elsewhere in the Iranian-Islamic world. The act of transcendence reveals, in Iranian thinkers, a presence beyond death. For example, for Sohrawardî (*see below*, Book III, Chapter V, 2), *Eastern* Knowledge (*ishrâqî*) is a presential knowledge (*'ilm hozûrî*); being illumination, it is also 'making present' (*istihzâr*). But this faculty of making present is proportional to the degree of immaterialisation (*tajarrod*) that man attains. The more the soul isolates itself, abstracting itself from matter, the more present it is and the more it is thereby removed from the realm of matter and the grip of death. This is why, upon reaching the total presence of infinite lights, the soul undergoes a transfiguration of all the senses and sees and hears through the inner eye and ear. Mollâ Sadrâ also maintains that the degree of existence is proportional to the degree of presence. The more intense the act of being, the act of existence, the more it is a presence in other worlds and the more the being is absent from death. Presence consists in separating oneself from the conditions of this world, in making up for the delay in achieving total presence. The more man dematerialises and withdraws, the more he also makes up for the delay caused by the Fall, and the more he thereby frees himself from the conditions of being-towards-death. Man's total presence transcends *the horizontality* of the completed whole that is freedom for death in Heidegger, and this by virtue of a vertical ascent through which death becomes a resurrection and the completed whole a Return to the Origin, that is to say, the point of coincidence of the two arcs of the Descent and the Ascent, and finally the place where the starting point of the cycle of Being meets the end point of the Return. Hence resurrection at the level of the sensible, then at the level of the Interworld of Images, and finally resurrection at the level of the world of Intelligences. From resurrection to resurrection, man climbs the ladder of ascent, blossoms into other worlds, makes his presence felt at other levels of Being. The *Da* extends vertically until its final consummation in the abyssal depths of super-existence in God. Being-in-the-world is not limited to the dimension of this world, nor to the temporalisation which, in its anticipatory momentum, surges ahead of itself towards death, but extends vertically to the Interworld of Images, to the world of Intelligences, each of these worlds having, moreover, its own temporalisation. Thus the dense and opaque time of the sensible world (*molk*); so too the subtle time of the world of *malakût*; so too the absolutely subtle time of the world *of Jabarût* (Intelligences). To the three modes of presence correspond three modes of knowledge, and each mode has, moreover, its own hermeneutics, be it *tafsîr*, literal commentary; *tafhîm*, 'making understood' through divine inspiration (*ilhâm*); or *ta'wîl*, which is

an immediate vision or inner revelation (*kashf*). It is therefore in the qualitative difference between these two ways of being-in-the-world that the full dimension of this *beyond* is revealed: a reversal of the time of horizons (*âfâqî*) into an inner time of the soul (*anfosî*), and the discovery of a *lost continent*, or indeed the revelation of the other side of the curtain of our world. And it is this *lost continent*, buried beneath the sands of the 'forgetfulness of Being', that Corbin rediscovers in the original memory of Iranian-Islamic thought.

CHAPTER III
Corbin and the Iranian World

All the themes that Corbin had developed and refined in his youth – and whose significance he had sensed in his studies of Luther, Hamann and Heidegger – were seeking a home capable of accommodating them and integrating them into the whole of an organic structure. And it was the Iranian world that provided them with this 'metaphysical framework'. Was not Iran's spiritual vocation precisely to forge a link between this Abrahamic tradition, which it had made its own by embracing Islam, and the Zoroastrian tradition it had inherited from its immemorial origins? The Iranian world enabled Corbin to articulate all the ideas dear to him within the framework of a cosmology that translated into angelology, and in which the mediating function of the Angel as a principle of individuation not only preserved the individual from any identification with an ideological totality, but also *safeguarded* the 'phenomenon', that is to say, the theophanic function. This, in turn, could safeguard monotheism from the twin pitfalls that lie in wait for it: anthropomorphism and abstract monotheism. Everything thus fell into place within the hierarchical structure of the universes, where the passage from one world to another became not only a hermeneutic (*ta'wîl*) but also a resurrection, an access to the Interworlds of Images, an absence in relation to the finitude of being-for-death. Hermeneutics thus became a shift from the historicity of empirical history to *the historicity* of hiero-history, and hence to the history of the soul in its dual journey of descent and ascent through the Interworlds of Return. *Ta'wîl* was linked to the theophanic function of the world; there would have been no *ta'wîl* if the world were not woven from a network of symbols, if it were not also a *mirror* reflecting Images from elsewhere, and if this very *ta'wîl*, transposing us to another level of being, did not allow us to perceive the world with transfigured senses: that is to say, with the eyes of the soul. For was not *ta'wîl* a passage from the apparent to the occult, from the exoteric to the esoteric, indeed the 'unveiling of the hidden' (*kashf al-mahjûb*)? This hermeneutics that Corbin had been seeking since his youth finally took shape in this primordial conception of Iranian-Islamic gnosis: *the unveiling of the hidden.* Here is what he himself says about it in one of his later works, in which he has already fully mastered his hermeneutical method:

'Let us instead consider the approach taken by phenomenological inquiry. It is essentially rooted in the motto of Greek science: *sôzeïn ta phaïnomena*, 'save the phenomena' (the appearances). What does this mean? The phenomenon is that which shows itself, that which is apparent and which, in its appearance, reveals something that can only be revealed within it by remaining simultaneously hidden beneath its appearance. (…) In the philosophical and religious sciences, the *phenomenon* is described in technical terms containing the element *phania*, derived from the Greek: epiphany, theophany, hierophany, etc. The phenomenon, the *phaïnomenon*, is the *zâhir*, the apparent, the exterior, the exoteric. That which reveals itself in this *zâhir*, whilst remaining hidden within it, is the *bâtin*, the interior, the esoteric. Phenomenology consists in 'saving the phenomenon', saving the appearance, by bringing to light or unveiling the hidden aspect that reveals itself beneath this appearance. (…) It is allowing the phenomenon to reveal itself as it reveals itself to the subject to whom it reveals itself. It is therefore an entirely different approach from that of the history of philosophy or historical criticism.

'But then, is not phenomenological inquiry what our ancient mystical treatises refer to as *kashf al-mahjûb*, the unveiling of that which is hidden? Is this not also what is meant by the term *ta'wîl*, which is fundamental to Qur'anic spiritual hermeneutics? *Ta'wîl* means to trace

a thing back to its source, to its archetype (*tchîzî-râ be-asl-e khwôd rasânîdan*). By leading it back there, we cause it to pass from one level of being to another, and in so doing we reveal the structure of an essence (which does not in any way imply being a structuralist). The structure is the *tartîb al-mazâhir*, the system of forms of manifestation of a given essence[74].'

But to 'bring a thing back to its source' is also to subject it to a kind of transformation, a shift in state from the successive to the simultaneous. And this is what Swedenborg was reminding us of when, in illustrating the shift from the successive to the simultaneous, he suggested something along the lines of the following: "that the highest and most original things in the successive order become the innermost and the heart in the simultaneous order, whilst the lower things and those occurring last in the successive order become the outer and extreme parts in the simultaneous structure[75]." If, then, the successive could be compared to the different sections of a temple column whose narrow circumference at the top widens from the top to the base, the simultaneous order would, by contrast, represent that same column collapsing in on itself to spread out over a flat surface, the top becoming the centre of the new figure. Thus this correspondence between the successive and the simultaneous suggested that in the

"In the case of the Divine Word, the celestial, the spiritual and the natural proceed in successive order, and ultimately present themselves in a simultaneous structure: the celestial and spiritual meanings of the Word are simultaneously present within the natural and literal meaning, which serves as their container and envelope[76]." Consequently, modes of spatiality vary according to modes of perception, and the inner vision of the man who performs the *ta'wîl* and who undergoes a rupture of level necessarily corresponds to modes of spatiality and temporality of his own. Corbin never ceased to explore the multiple meanings of these modes, both within the *imaginal* space of narratives and within the subtle time of hierohistory: Nature thus becoming the symbolic face of the *Liber mundi* and *hierohistory* the spiritual meaning of *the Liber revelatus*, as well as the 'history' of prophecy.

All of Corbin's key ideas, as we were saying, found, in a sense, their proper place and setting within the visionary landscape of the Iranian world. The 'You and I' dialogue of dialectical theology was transformed into the bi-unity of the self and the Angel, and hence into the spiritual individuation of man; the *significatio passiva* of the Lutheran era, the multiple tones of the art of *ta'wîl*, whose vibrations the Iranian philosophers had pushed to dizzying heights, linking it here to narrative (*hikâyat*), there to the inner meaning of the Book, and yet again to the alchemical metamorphosis of the Subject itself. The *eschatological nunc* of the Hamannian period expanded to encompass the prodigious prospects of resurrections and rebirths in the worlds of the Soul and the Spirit; the world of the symbol found its real space in the *imaginal* situs where the Angel, as it were, spatialised his own body of light. The temporality of the Heideggerian era was organised hierarchically according to hermeneutic levels, translating at times into the dense time of the sensible world, at times into the subtle time of the world of the soul, and at times into the absolutely subtle time of the world of the Cherubic Intelligences. And the sense of disorientation revealed by Heideggerian Nothingness now took on the nostalgic tone of the soul exiled in this world in search of its inner guide, that is to say, its Angel; whilst the annihilation of Anxiety in the night of Nothingness became the reverential fear of the majestic rigour of the Divine which, whilst annihilating us in its Majesty, thereby ensured our sur-existence (*baqâ'*).

The Iranian world, situated geographically between the Indian subcontinent and the Arab world, was the land of Zoroaster and Sohrawardi, of Ruzbehân and Hafez. A 'Middle Kingdom' and 'mediator', it had witnessed all manner of improbable syntheses, marrying the prophet Zoroaster with the Sage Plato and uniting them both within the Niche of Prophetic Enlightenment of the Abrahamic tradition. It had transformed the religion of Zoroaster into an Order of spiritual knighthood, and turned the heroic epic of the ancient heroes of Iran into a mystical epic of the visionary tales of the period

Islamic. He had taken the vision of the Angel and angelic revelation to dizzying heights and translated Platonic Ideas into terms of Zoroastrian angelology. He had endowed the Imagination with such evocative power that everyday reality seemed pale and fictitious compared to its magical and creative reality. He had elevated the cult of Beauty to the point of ecstasy and made Love the religion of the Eternal Feminine. He had transformed the cycle of prophecy into a cycle of Initiation and turned the time of our world into the in-between time of eschatological Waiting. He had identified the future Zoroastrian saviour Saoshyant with the miracle of the occultation of the Hidden Imam and, together with the twelve Imams, created the *formative structure* of the Temple of Eternal Prophecy. He had taken up this philosophy which, with Averroes, was being lost in the sands, and, by restoring the ancient Iranian wisdom of the Orient of Light, had saved gnosis, thereby making philosophy a mystical experience and this experience a philosophy of salvation. He had finally given due value to that *continent* towards which Corbin's journey led, namely the *mundus imaginalis*, that intermediate world between the sensible and the intelligible, the Land of Visions which, from the paradise of Yima in the Avesta to the fabulous cities of *Hûrqalyâ*, *Jâbalqâ* and *Jâbarsâ* in Iranian-Islamic Gnosticism, symbolised the Pure Land of the Angel and of infinite Lights – that Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*) which once haloed the sages and sovereigns of ancient Persia.

Thus the Iranian world was *intermediate* in every sense: geographically, intermediate between the spiritual world of India and the Arab world. Ontologically, Persia represented the Interworld of Metaphysical Images where knowledge acquired a distinct noetic value, thereby configuring a
'theophanic vision of the world'; intermediate also in the sense of time, where the Occultation of the Hidden Imam became, so to speak, the interim period of the Waiting for the final Parousia. This *intermediary structure*, both in terms of its geographical location and on the ontological level of Image and Time, ultimately constituted the fundamental *Gestalt* of the Iranian world; and it is this world that Corbin chose as his spiritual home.

CHAPTER IV
The Metaphysics of the Imagination

It would take an entire book to explain, in all its many facets, everything Corbin had to say about this '*imaginal* world' which, in his view, so aptly characterises the unique nature of the Iranian spiritual universe. Sohrawardî was the first to establish its ontological status, but it already appears in Avicenna's cosmology. It is the invisible thread that constitutes the memory of the Iranian world and which renews and transforms itself with every assault from the outside, with every rupture imposed upon it by the countless invaders who have crossed the Iranian plateau. A Hyperborean paradise, Yima's Var in the sacred book of ancient Persia and Light-of-Glory (*Xvarnah*) in Zoroastrian cosmology, it reappears in the 'eighth climate' of all our philosophers: from Avicenna to Hâdî Sabzavârî, via Sohrawardî and Mollâ Sadrâ, not to mention the contribution of the great visionary poets. It is that eternally fresh spring from which the soul of Iran draws its identity and the spiritual treasures bequeathed to it by its ancestors. 'From century to century,' says Corbin, 'the meditation of Iranian thinkers has focused on the status of a world that is neither that of empirical perception nor that of abstract understanding. The idea of this intermediate universe reappears from Sohrawardî (12th century) to Sadrâ Shîrâzî (17th century), Hâdî Sabzavârî (19th century) and so many others right up to the present day. They have given this universe various names: sometimes, by reference to the seven climates of traditional geography, they have called it the 'eighth climate'; at other times, more technically, as the *'âlam al-mithâl*'[77]."

This 'eighth climate' has multiple resonances in both ontology and cosmology and angelology. It establishes a metaphysics of Images in which these acquire their own cognitive and noetic value. For Images arise not from the unconscious but from the superconscious; they are therefore, by that very fact, intellectual Images. To distinguish them clearly from the imaginary, which, as 'madwoman of the house' produces only the fictitious and the unreal, Corbin coined the term '*imaginal*'. The world of the Imaginal, *'âlam al-mithâl*, is the world in which the visions of prophets and mystics, and the events of the soul, take place—events as real as those of the sensible world but which occur on another level of Being.

Let us begin by noting that the world of *the imaginal* fits into the framework of a cosmology that translates into angelology[78]. The metaphysical Image becomes the Angel's thought, the mode of its own spatialisation; it has an extent and a dimension, 'an "immaterial" materiality, certainly, in relation to that of the sensible world, but ultimately, a "corporeality" and a spatiality of its own[79] '; the space of conjunction where the human soul and the Angel imagine one another. To clearly distinguish the intellective quality of the Image from its estimative nature, or if you will, *the imaginal* from the imaginary, Sohrawardî makes it clear to us that when it is the Intellect that fertilises it, the imagination becomes an angel, that is to say, a cogitative and meditative faculty (*mofakkir*). Conversely, when the estimative (*wahm*) bursts into it, it transforms into fantasy (*motakhayyila*) and becomes a demon (*see below*, Book IV, Chapter III, 3). Hence its ambiguous position, at times determined by the intellect, at times led astray by the estimative.

If the Intellectual Image is the subtle matter of the Angel, it is because it is an *Interworld* between the Intelligible and the sensible, enjoying an autonomous existence and its own transfiguring power. This intermediate world ensures, first and foremost, continuity and progression at the levels

ontologically superior; it is the *locus* of the soul's experiences, of the visionary narratives so significant in the contemplative states of mysticism; it enables the articulation of a symbolic language, since images are transformed in this realm that is half-spiritual, half-sensible (*Geistleiblichkeit*), in which the soul's subliminal impressions appear in symbolised forms – and this applies both to the level of eschatological anticipation and to the posthumous level of the soul's becoming (subtle body of resurrection). This world, being an inner unveiling, is an inversion of time and space: what was hidden beneath appearances is suddenly revealed to envelop what was hitherto external; the invisible thus becomes visible; it is therefore *situational* and not situ é [80]. The passage into this world requires a shift from the time of horizons to the time of the soul, and thus a spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wîl*). Finally, this world, by virtue of its capacity for metamorphosis, projects a visionary geography with its fabulous cities, mountains, springs and rivers.

1) An intermediate world of Images

In the preface to the second edition of **Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth**, entitled **Towards a Charter of the Imaginal**, Corbin writes: 'For a long time… Western philosophy—let us call it "official" philosophy—carried along in the wake of the positive sciences, has recognised only two sources of knowledge. There is sensory perception, providing what we call empirical data. And there are the concepts of the intellect, the world of laws governing this empirical data. Admittedly, phenomenology has modified and moved beyond this simplistic epistemology. Yet the fact remains that between sensory perceptions and the intuitions or categories of the intellect, the space has remained empty. That which ought to have occupied the space between them—and which elsewhere occupied this middle ground, namely the active imagination—was left to the poets. That this active imagination in man (one ought to say 'agent imagination', just as medieval philosophy spoke of the 'agent intellect') has its own noetic or cognitive function—that is to say, that it gives us access to a region and reality of Being which, without it, remains closed and forbidden to us—is something that a scientific, rational and reasonable philosophy could not conceive. It was understood, for such a philosophy, that the Imagination produces only the imaginary, that is to say, the unreal, the mythical, the marvellous, fiction, etc .[81] ."

The imaginal world, being intermediate, is two-dimensional; this is what distinguishes it from the other two: through each of these two dimensions, it symbolises the universe to which that dimension corresponds. The spirit, in order to appear to the vision of the heart, descends into this world and there takes on form and extension; sensory data are transformed there into symbols through the organ of the theophanic imagination. It is here, says 'Abdorrazzâq Lâhîjî, that accidents subtly materialise and the results of actions take on a corporeal form. Hence the subtle quality, the diaphanous substance of its mode of being, which prompted Sohrawardî to describe it as the world of 'suspended images'. It is the imprint of this world that we discover in the images seen in mirrors, forms polished to excess, transparent springs, shimmering waters, floating mirages, and so on. Situated between two modes of being without belonging to either, yet enabling their interaction and their consubstantial simultaneity (where one takes on form to appear – spirit – and the other sheds its matter), it is that which binds these two modes of being through the synchronic effect of *coincidence*. "If we do not have," says Corbin, "a cosmology whose framework can contain, like that of our traditional philosophers, this plurality of universes in ascending order, our Imagination will remain *dislocated*, and its recurring conjunctions with the will to power will be an inexhaustible source of terror for us[82]."

2) The world of the Imaginal and the science of mirrors

The world of the Imaginal, as we were saying, employs a science of mirrors, a ‘transparition’ that Corbin translates as the ‘phenomenon of the mirror’. ‘The material substance of the mirror, be it metal or mineral,’ he says, ‘is not the substance of the image, a substance of which the image would be an accident. It is simply the “place of its appearance” (…). Active Imagination is the *mirror* par excellence, the epiphanic locus of the Images of the world of archetypes; this is why the theory of *the mundus imaginalis* is inextricably linked to a theory of imaginative knowledge and the imaginative function[83].’ An ‘image in suspension’ is neither material nor purely spiritual; it is the in-between. On the one hand, it has an immaterial form; on the other, the spirit appears in it clothed in a form of its own. And this is what was brought to bear, for example, by the idea *of Iltibâs* (amphiboly) in Rûzbehân of Shîrâz (cf. *infra*, Book V, chap. III, 3). For the sensible, the visible thus has a double meaning (amphiboly); it is and is not at the same time. Every theophany is a mirror which, whilst revealing being, nonetheless conceals its hidden dimension, just as the mirror, showing the image that manifests itself therein, refers to that which remains veiled beyond the image. Amphiboly thus presupposes a transfiguration that makes possible the point of convergence of this double meaning: it is what leads from the duality of the seer and the seen to the theophanic union where they, so to speak, reverse their roles: the Lover now perceives all things through the transfiguring gaze of the Beloved. Thanks to the phenomenon of the mirror, he now perceives the human face transfigured to the level of the divine Face, and it is with the eye of the Beloved that he rediscovers the human face, so that the Lover, the Beloved and the bond uniting them become *homochromatic* (*hamrang*). Yet this phenomenon could not have taken place if the vision itself had not remained at an equal distance from a double pitfall: the *ta’tîl* (the reduction of the whole to the unconditional absolute) and the *tashbîh* (the reduction of the whole to multiplicity). In other words, it is by saving the ‘phenomenon’ that one thereby saves the noetic value of the Image, that is to say, of *the Icon*, by preserving it against idolatry. It is also this ‘science of the gaze’ (*’ilm-e nazar*), centred on the theophanic vision of the metaphysical Image, that makes a poet such as Hafez a ‘Player of the Gaze’ (*nazar-bâz*). For the ‘player of the gaze’ does not see the world as an object, nor as a thing represented, placed there before us, but as a Game of Images reflected upon the bewitching mirrors of the universe, being and not being at the same time. The poet’s visionary gaze is a Game whose stake is the Game through which the Divine looks upon the world, and Hafez concludes:

> *“If the divine face becomes the epiphany of our gaze*
> *There is no doubt that you are now the possessor of the gaze.*[84]*”*

3) The reversal of Time and Space

In the narrative entitled **The Rustling of Gabriel’s Wings** by Sohrawardî (*see below*, Book IV, Chapter III, 2), a figure appears who, in Avicenna’s work, was named Hayy ibn Yaqzân (The Living, son of the Watcher) but who, in Sohrawardî’s work, is called *the Crimson Archangel* (*’aql-e sorkh*). To the question of the pilgrim, who has already reached another level of being, the Archangel’s reply is as follows: ‘I come from *Nâ-kojâ-âbâ d*[85]’.

This term is rarely found in the Persian dictionary and was coined by Sohrawardî himself.
Literally, it means the land (*âbâd*) of Nowhere (*Nâ-kojâ*), that is to say, a mysterious place situated, as it were, ‘beyond’ the psycho-cosmic mountain *Qâf*. The realm beyond *Qâf* cannot be located on our maps, just like the mythical cities of *Jâbalqâ*, *Jâbarsâ* and *Hûrqalyâ*. Topographically, this region begins ‘at the convex surface’[86] of the Ninth Sphere, the Sphere of Spheres, the one that encompasses the entire cosmos. It thus emerges at the point where one leaves the coordinates of our world and the sphere to which the cardinal points refer. Having crossed that boundary, the

question *of where* (*kojâ*) loses all meaning. Hence the name *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*. A place outside of place, a 'place' that is not contained within a place, within a *topos*.

But once this threshold is crossed, a kind of *reversal* of time and space takes place: what was hidden beneath appearances is suddenly revealed, opens up and envelops what was hitherto external. The invisible becomes visible. From now on, it is the spirit that envelops and contains matter. Spiritual reality is no longer in the 'where'. Rather, it is the 'where' that is within it. It is, says Corbin, itself the 'where' of all things[87] . "Its place (its *âbâd*) in relation to this is *Nâ-kojâ* (non-where), because its *ubi* in relation to what is in sensible space is an *ubique* (everywhere)[88] ."

This place is not '*situated* but situative[89]'. In other words, it is the privileged space of the soul that reveals itself, that reveals its own landscape (the *Xvarnah*), transforming into symbolic forms the Figures intended to represent spiritual realities. It can only be accessed through a sudden break with geographical coordinates. In fact, one reverses one's gaze: one now sees all things through the eyes of the soul. Entering it is therefore an *extasis*, a fleeting, often unconscious shift and a change of state. Often the pilgrim only realises this with wonder or a sense of unease that gives them a strange feeling of disorientation. 'One sets off; at a certain point, a break occurs with the geographical coordinates identifiable on our maps. However, the traveller is not aware of this at the precise moment; they only realise it, with unease or wonder, in hindsight (…). Yet they can only describe where they have been; they cannot show the way to anyone[90].'

4) The post-mortem Otherworld of imaginal forms

We have already noted that the world of the Imaginal is absolutely essential to prevent a gap in the hierarchy of being. Consequently, the Imaginal is not to be equated with Platonic Ideas, but represents an intermediate stage between the world of Ideas and the sensible world. To properly convey its importance at all levels, and above all its essential function for resurrection in the eschatological vision of mystics and philosophers, Corbin draws our attention to the fact that the world in question is, in truth, situated within a *double Interworld*, both at the level of the arc of Descent (*nozûl*, the passage from the One to the many) and at the level of the arc of Ascent, through which all created beings aspire to return to their original source. Situated on the 'arc of Descent', this Interworld is designated as the city of *Jâbalqâ*, that is to say, the world of the Imaginal as such, thus ontologically preceding the world of sensible phenomena. On the other hand, however, viewed from the perspective of the Return, it is the City of Shadows *of Jâbarsâ*. It is therefore situated on the arc of the Ascension, that is to say, at a level ontologically posterior to the sensible world, since it marks, if you will, the fateful threshold of the resurrection. It is consequently the *post-mortem* world of the actualised forms of the soul, the world of archetypal subtle bodies. Everything that existed in potential within the soul, such as subtle impressions arising from acquired habits, moral behaviours, and the consequences of actions, appears there in forms corresponding to the quality of the impressions from which they proceed. Thus the Imaginal appears on the arc of the Ascent, consisting mainly of subtle and archetypal bodies (*jism mithâli*). This power of symbolisation and typification, as Corbin puts it, is linked to the active imagination of the soul. It is the soul (the Form) that is the principle of individuation, Sadrâ Shîrâzî tells us[91]. It is thus 'pure form' and, as Form, it is also a substance separate and independent of the matter of the physical body (*jawhar majarrad 'an mâddat al-badan*)[92]. And since these 'imaginative Forms' subsist in the manner in which a thing subsists through its active agent (*fâ'il*) and not in the manner in which a thing would persist through its passive receptacle (*qâlib*), the Imagination is therefore essentially an *active Imagination*.

This active imagination endows the soul with the power of creativity, of shaping (*taswîr*) and

typification (*tamthîl*). But this creativity of the soul ensures that it possesses the faculty to anticipate eschatological visions. The vision of the afterlife may occur either in this very existence by virtue of mystical experiences through which the soul anticipates eschatological visions, or when the soul, through the minor resurrection that is death, gains access to the *post-mortem* interworlds. In any case, the principle – whether in this world or in the hereafter – is the same: the soul reproduces and shapes its world.

To conclude, we might say that the world of *the imaginal* encompasses the entire history of the soul: between a *prehistory*—which is the story of its descent into the world—and a *posthistory*—which is the story of its return to God—lies the *hierohistory* of the soul's events; it is therefore the key that opens up to us both the 'phenomenology of angelic consciousness' and the *post-mortem* history of the soul's becoming on its journey back to God.

As for the *visionary geography* of this intermediate world and its relationship with the archetypes of Mazdean cosmology such as *Xvarnah*, *Eran-Vej*, and the symbolism of the emerald cities: *Jâbalqâ*, *Hûrqalyâ*, situated beyond the psychocosmic mountain of *Qâf*, etc., we refer the reader to one of Corbin's most interesting works: **Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth***. In the first part, Corbin devotes highly evocative pages to the visionary geography of Mazdeism and the symbolism of the land of visions and the land of resurrection in Iranian-Islamic gnosis; and in a second, no less evocative part, he offers us a judicious selection of traditional texts ranging from Sohrawardî to contemporary representatives of the Shaykhie School, via Dawûd Qaysârî, Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî and many others besides.

As for the consequences of the *loss* of this world, which was 'exiled from the schema of Being' in the West and whose catastrophic loss reduced reality to the sole dimension of empirical facts, thereby provoking the 'rationalisation of the Spirit', we shall return to this later in the conclusion of this book, when we discuss the relevance of Henry Corbin's thought today.

CHAPTER V
Corbin's four journeys through the Iranian-Islamic world

The hermeneutics employed by Corbin leads, as we have just seen, to the intermediate world of *the imaginal*, where the subtle time of hierohistory and the subtle space of the soul emerge simultaneously. From this *platform*, Corbin pursues four simultaneous paths towards the four 'climates of being' of the Iranian-Islamic world. Insofar as the imaginal space is an order of simultaneity and transmutation of forms, we might say that Corbin's entire hermeneutical endeavour tends, in a sense, to convert time into space. The four articulations that emerge from this have no priority over one another; they do not translate into terms of evolution, nor do they follow one another according to a process of historical development, but remain four simultaneous, isomorphic and, all things considered, interchangeable structures. In other words, they are the four radiations of a single *Gestalt*. Each of these movements can be compared to a musical melody whose structure remains identical and recognisable when transposed into different registers. The four modes of being that we have identified in Corbin's spiritual trajectory are as follows: 1) *from the cycle of Prophecy to the cycle of Initiation*; 2) *from the metaphysics of essences to the theosophy of Presence*; 3) *from doctrinal exposition to visionary narratives*; 4) *from human love to divine love*. These four paths radiate from the luminous centre of *the mundus imaginalis*. The transition they imply is accomplished at this level; for they are, each in their own way, the reversal of one state into another, and consequently a *ta'wîl* and a shift in level. The descent of the Letter (*tanzîl*) of revelation corresponds to the return to the original meaning (*ta'wîl*) of the cycle of initiation; the essences characterising the whole of being are superseded by the presence of the act of being as testimony; the narration of the story is answered by the unfolding of an event which is the story of the soul itself; and human love is superseded by the transfiguration of divine love. Whether it be a return to the original meaning, the presence of the act of being as testimony, the internalisation of the narrative as an event of the soul, or the transfiguration brought about by divine love, it is, in each case, a conversion and an inner metamorphosis of the Subject; all of which take place and have 'their place' in the intermediate world of the Imaginal. Consequently, four modes of expression emerge in relation to each of the four dimensions: *the prophetic mode (prophetic philosophy), the ontological mode, the narrative mode, and the erotic-mystical mode*—or, if you will, four mystical journeys through faith, the intellect, the imagination, and the affectivity of the heart. As none of these modes takes precedence over the others, and each can be transformed into the other by virtue of the homologous structures that govern them, the transition made is, on each occasion, a *ta'wîl*, a mystical experience, that is to say, an *individuation* in which the Inner Guide is typified in each case in a form consistent with the mode of expression that characterises it: be it the Imam of the Shia believer, the Active Intellect of the philosopher, the Angel of the visionary, or the Beloved of the lover. These four paths are thus akin to the four avenues opening out from the central pavilion of the transfiguration of the gaze. Together they form *the Imago mundi*, or, if you will, the shape of a *mandala* (see diagram p. 85).

They also symbolise the many manifestations of a single archetype (the inner guide)

which appears at times as the Angel (or the concrete figures associated with it), at times as the active Intelligence, illuminating the philosophical vision, at times as the figure of Sophia in the religion of love, and at times as the Imam in the cycle of spiritual initiation. The archetype of the Inner Guide is, however, linked to the theophanic function of the Angel, for, by virtue of the mediation it brings about between the One and the many, it thereby makes possible the phenomenon of conjunction or, if you will, of the establishment of a bond between man and the divine. Without this mediation, which presupposes the Angel and the *imaginal* world in which it blossoms, the gap in the scale of Being could never be avoided, and monotheism would perish, leading either to 'metaphysical idolatry', that is to say, the reduction of the One to the many, or to abstract monotheism, which is the dissolution of multiplicity into the unconditional One. Consequently, the theophany of the Angel saves the phenomenon by making it manifest in the imaginal space of the encounter. Thus, the exemplifications of a single archetype not only determine the nature and mode of knowledge but also establish a distinct anthropology and a specific mode of unveiling. If, at the level of prophetic philosophy, the Inner Guide is the Archangel Gabriel for the prophet and the Imam for the Shia mystic, the anthropological types representing them will be, respectively, the Prophet Muhammad (the Seal of Prophethood) and his eschatological counterpart, the Twelfth Imam (Seal of the Cycle of Initiation). The modes of knowledge associated with each of these two prophetic functions will be either revelation (*wahy*) and the descent of the Word (*tanzîl*) for the law-giving prophet, or Inspiration (*ilhâm*) and the return of the Word to its Source (*ta'wîl*) for the Imam in general. The archetype of the Inner Guide transcends the laws of historical causality, for it symbolises, as we have just seen, the principle of the Self or mystical individuation. The entire history or hagiography of the Twelfth Imam, for example, unfolds in a parallel world. The world of the Angel or the Imam remains between the worlds, just as his time lies between times.

The Inner Guide that emerges from the philosophical realm is the Active Intellect. Identifying this with the Angel of Revelation of the prophets is a crucial fact for spiritual Islam. Without this identification, there would have been no 'prophetic philosophy' and religion would have had no possible connection with the mysticism of love, with philosophy, or with the visionary narratives of the poets. We would have witnessed the emergence of a dual truth, a rupture between faith and knowledge, between theology and philosophy. All these things occurred in Western thought but were avoided in Iran, thanks to the synthesis achieved by Sohrawardî. This thinker, by embracing the wisdom of the ancient Persians, brought the Hellenised Magi back to Islamic Iran, and also led the Greek philosophers back to the Niche of prophetic light. He thus became the creative focal point of an encounter between Iranianism and Hellenism within the illuminative tradition of *Ishrâq*. Now Platonic Ideas were clothed in the resplendent garb of the Iranian Archangels. Thus the Archangel Bahman, the Angel Gabriel, and the Active Intellect became equivalent concepts.

But he went further: building on Avicenna's 'Eastern philosophy', Sohrawardî initiated a whole cycle of narratives in which he applied the *ta'wîl* to the hieratic figures of the heroic epics of ancient Iran. He brought about 'the transition from the heroic epic to the mystical epic'. Thus, the deeds of the heroes of the Avesta and Ferdowsî's *Shahnâmeh* (Book of Kings) (10^{th} century) also became part of the phenomenon of the Holy Book. This is why the Inner Guide, in the narrative mode of mystical tales, appears at times as the mythical bird of Iranian mythology (*Simorgh*), at times as the Ageless Youth, and at times as the Angel Bahman of Zoroastrianism, whilst the anthropological type that exemplifies them is the prototype of the ecstatic Sage, Kay Khosraw, holder of the Grail (*Jâm-e Jam*) and perfect Sage (the theosophist – *hakîm-e mota'allah*), who embodies both the Sage's cosmic vision and the hero's epic deeds. In short, a Sovereign-Sage who has always been one of Iran's greatest ethical ideals. He is the pivotal figure through whom the transition occurs from the narrative (*hikâyat*) to the event of the soul as the Angel's

of the Angel, since, being, moreover, an eschatological hero, Kay Khosraw answers the Angel's call. His inner Guide is the Sorûsh of *the Shahnâmeh*, who is also the embodiment of the Xth Intellect of the philosophers, just as the spiritual Guide of another hero, Afrâsiyâh, will be the bird *Sîmorgh*, which will naturally serve his ecstasy and his departure from this world (Book IV).

In the erotic-mystical mode, it is the Angel once more, but in the form of the Beloved, of Sophia, who assumes the Gnostic role of 'Guide' for the mystic-pilgrim. The anthropological archetype is Majnûn, the perfect Lover and mirror of God (*see below*, Book V). Majnûn has so internalised the Beloved (Leylâ) that he sees nothing but her; he sees her reflection everywhere, in a mountain, in a flower. The Beloved is, in a sense, the image through which the world appears to him as transfigured in the halo of Beauty. Hence his mode of knowledge, which is amphiboly (*iltibâs* – Rûzbehân): an apparition that is and is not at the same time, a double meaning that reveals and veils simultaneously. His words are dazzling paradoxes, for just as divine Beauty appears transfigured by the mirror of the lover's heart, so too does the inexpressible, the ineffable, appears clothed in paradoxes, all the more bewildering for being inspired, that is to say, arising from the very ambiguity of the mystery of Being.

The anthropological type that emerges from the ontological-philosophical approach is Zoroaster/Plato; that is to say, the Wise Theosophist. This identification was the work of Sohrawardî. However, the transition from the metaphysics of essences to the philosophy of Presence postulated by Mulla Sadra Shirazi is the apotheosis of a philosophy that aims to be pure gnosis. It is the transition from being to the act of being, and this could not have been achieved had Mulla Sadra not reversed the situation by making presence (presentational knowledge) the foundation of the unveiling of Being. This is also the natural development of a trend which, beginning with Sohrawardi, sought to integrate mysticism into philosophy. Sohrawardî had already invited us to do so when, by uniting speculative knowledge and mystical experience, he inaugurated the philosophy of illumination. The philosophy of *Ishrâq* (illumination) is a royal path. The ecstatic heroes who embody its truth are now Hermes, Plato, Kay Khosraw, Zoroaster, and Muhammad: the Greek prophet as much as the Iranian and Arab prophet. The path it describes is that of gnosis; it is the path of the 'race of seers' which leads to *ta'alloh*, that is to say, *apotheosis*. Philosophy now becomes a narrative of initiation leading from Western exile to the immediate vision of the Angel on the mystical Sinai. The Wise Theosophist possesses both speculative knowledge and mystical experience. This same programme would later be taken up by Mulla Sadra when he said of the philosopher, likened to a pilgrim towards God (*Sâlik*), that he must synthesise the two methods, that his inner asceticism must never be devoid of philosophical meditation, and vice versa. Undoubtedly, the metaphysics of essences espoused by al-Farabi and Avicenna left the relationship between mysticism and philosophy ambiguous. In fact, the Peripatetics only began to philosophise from the *standpoint* of being (necessary being); the act of being, or if you will, the imperative origination which is the central pillar of a philosophy of presence, was excluded from their ontology. However, Avicenna had already sketched out in his Eastern Philosophy (*infra*, Book IV) the premises of a mystical philosophy in which knowledge was elevated to the level of a visionary narrative; but it fell to Mulla Sadra to overturn, through a philosophical revolution, the primacy of essences, which remained that of Sohrawardi as well, although the latter, by establishing an Eastern form of knowledge as an act of presence (*istihzâr*) and immaterialisation (*tajarrod*), postulated—without naming it explicitly, however—a philosophy of presence. For Mulla Sadra, the idea *of istihzâr* (making present) gives primacy to Being over the Metaphysics of essences: for the act of being is capable of intensification and weakening. It is the act of being that already determines what constitutes an essence. This results in a perspective in which the intensifications of being encompass all degrees of existence. The metaphysics of existence ultimately leads to a metaphysics of *Presence*, which is also a testimony.

The more a being is present to itself, the more it detaches itself from the conditions of this world, the more it bridges the gap with Total Presence, and the further it moves away from that which conditions absence. 'The more intense the degree of Presence, the more intense the act of existing, and consequently the more that existence extends beyond death.'

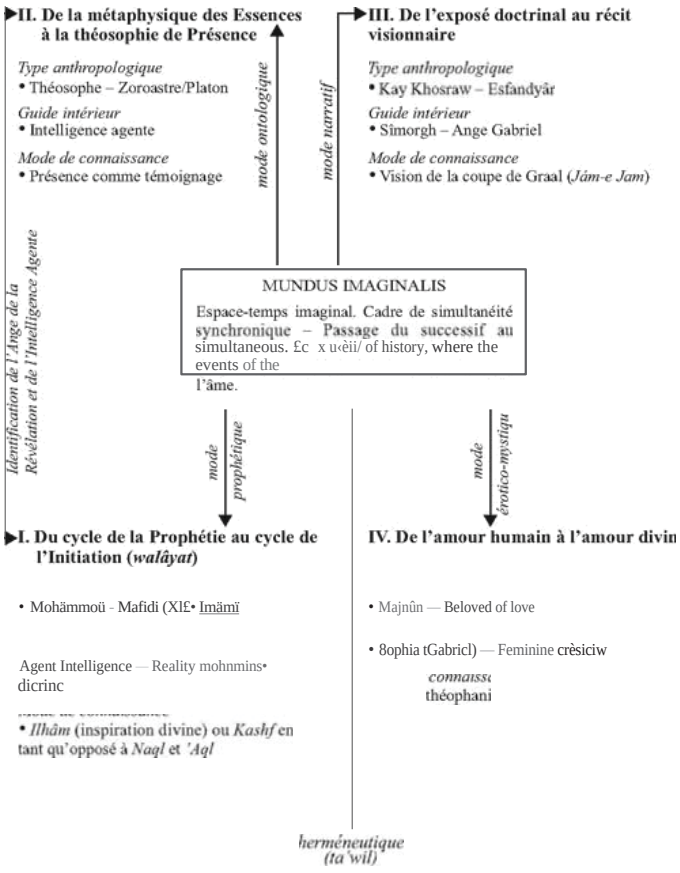
From all this arise the major themes of Sadrian metaphysics: the primacy of the act of existing; the theory of intrasubstantial movement; the theory of the imagination as a purely spiritual faculty; and finally, the philosophy of resurrection, which depicts the Gnostic history of the soul, with the threefold growth of man across the three levels of the world of sensible phenomena, the soul, and the Spirit. It is thus in the person of Mulla Sadra that the great synthesis of all the spiritual currents of Islam is completed: Avicennism, Sohrawardi's *Ishraq*, the speculative gnosis of Ibn 'Arabi, and the quintessence of the teachings of the prophets and the Imams. All this enabled the great philosophical renaissance to flourish in Iran in the 16th century, a renaissance that had no parallel elsewhere in the Islamic world.

As for the relationships governing these four paths, let us simply say that they represent homologous structures or, as Corbin puts it, *isomorphic* ones. '… to move from one dimension to another, one requires the perception of a constant structure, of an *isomorphism*, just as a melody can be produced at different pitches: each time the melodic elements are different, but the structure is the same; it is the same melody, the same musical figure, the same *Gestalt*'[93].

Finally, we wish to emphasise that this book is a modest introduction to the thought of Henry Corbin, viewed through the lens of these four thematic strands. The sole merit of this book, if indeed it has any at all, has been to present the scope of a spiritual journey spanning thousands of dense pages within a structured framework, so that the reader might gain even the most cursory of insights. We do not claim to have exhausted his work or to have grasped all its subtle nuances. We have closely followed his thought and even his terminology and transliteration, so that one might say of Books II to V that they are Corbin written by himself. We have confined ourselves solely to bringing together the major themes that frequently appear, in various forms, throughout his work and which may seem difficult to grasp for the uninitiated reader. As the guiding principle of our work was fidelity, we have often stepped back to let the Master speak for himself. Nor was it our place to verify his sources or to question his interpretations; we had neither the expertise nor the means to do so. That would have taken as long as it took Corbin to produce his life's work. If we were to summarise our approach to his work in a few words, we might repeat here what Gide said about his translation of Rabindranath Tagore:

"I took pleasure in humbling myself before him, just as he himself had humbled himself to sing before God e [94]."

THE FOUR CORBIN SCHOOLS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD


II. De la métaphysique des Essences à la théosophie de Présence
Type anthropologique
• Théosophe – Zoroastre/Platon
Guide intérieur
• Intelligence agente
Mode de connaissance
• Présence comme témoignage
mode ontologique
mode narratif
III. De l'exposé doctrinal au récit visionnaire
Type anthropologique
• Kay Khosraw – Esfandyâr
Guide intérieur
• Sîmorgh – Ange Gabriel
Mode de connaissance
• Vision de la coupe de Graal (Jám-e Jam)
Identification de l'Ange de la Révélation et de l'Intelligence Agente
MUNDUS IMAGINALIS
Espace-temps imaginal. Cadre de simultanéité synchronique – Passage du successif au simultaneous. £c x uɛii/ of history, where the events of the
l'âme.
mode prophétique
mode érotico-mystiqu
I. Du cycle de la Prophétie au cycle de l'Initiation (walâyat)
• Mohämmoü - Mafidi (Xl£• Imämï
Agent Intelligence — Reality mohnmins•
dicrinc
• Ilhâm (inspiration divine) ou Kashf en tant qu'opposé à Naql et 'Aql
IV. De l'amour humain à l'amour divin
• Majnûn — Beloved of love
• 8ophia tGabricl) — Feminine crèsiciw
connaissa
théophani
herméneutique (ta'wil)

BOOK II
From the cycle of prophecy (*Nobowwat*) to the cycle of initiation (*Walâyat*)

CHAPTER I
The Phenomenon of the Holy Book

The phenomenon of the Holy Book lies at the heart of Henry Corbin's reflection on the hermeneutics of the Book and the religious community of the peoples who have practised its spiritual exegesis. This question is linked to other, no less important issues, a full understanding of which can shed light on the phenomenon as a whole and its subsequent integration into speculative philosophy. Who, first and foremost, are the 'People of the Book' (*Ahl al-kitâb)*? How do they go about performing the esoteric reading of the Holy Book? What are the criteria that distinguish the Holy Book from any other profane book? What is the divide which, arising precisely from the phenomenon of the Holy Book, separated the two main branches of Islam, namely Sunni and Shia Islam; and finally, can the shared vision of the 'People of the Book' serve as the starting point for a comparative anthropology? These are the essential questions that the phenomenon of the Holy Book raises for Corbin, and which are all the more essential to him as this phenomenon also explains the premises of 'prophetic philosophy': the identification of the Angel of Knowledge and the Angel of Revelation.

The Qur'anic expression *Ahl al-Kitâb*, literally the 'People of the Book', refers to a religious community which, first and foremost, possesses a Holy Book and constantly engages in its reading on multiple levels; a community whose existence and religious motivation—which determine its behaviour—stem from this Book, because its religion is founded on a Book sent down from Heaven, a Book that was revealed to a prophet sent by God. Consequently, alongside Muslims, there are other communities that also possess a Book: such as Jews and Christians. In Iran, the Zoroastrians, by virtue of their sacred Book, the Avesta, have also enjoyed this rare privilege.

Since this Holy Book fundamentally shapes their way of being in the world and determines both their knowledge and their worldview, the primary task incumbent upon the 'People of the Book' is that of understanding. How can one understand, without deluding oneself, the essence of a Book revealed to the Prophet in a cryptic and coded language?

"Thus is established the legitimacy of the technique of *ta'wîl*," says Corbin, "to 'redirect' the letter of all Revelations to their esoteric meaning[95] . "Because the Book is not merely made up of paper and ink but also contains a meaning, and because this meaning unfolds on several levels in proportion to the purity of the soul and the spiritual experience of the reader, and because, originally, every sacred Book is the visible appearance (*zâhir*) of an invisible and inner meaning (*bâtin*), it is therefore necessary to trace the apparent back to its 'eternal archetype', and thence to the 'Mother of the Book' (*Omm al-Kitâb*), for the Mother of the Book is precisely the divine Word hidden beneath the outer covering.

If the Word, by inspiring the souls of the prophets, effected a kind of *descent* (*tanzîl*) into the prophet's heart, its esoteric interpretation will be the reverse path of that descent; it will be a *ta'wîl*, that is to say, the tracing of the apparent meaning back to its esoteric source; hence the idea of a reversal of the time of horizons into an inner psychic time; hence also access to the meta-history of the soul and the necessity of a *hierognosis*.

On the other hand, the phenomenon of the Holy Book only blossoms within a prophetic religion, that is to say, a 'religion professing the necessity of superhuman mediators between the divinity that inspires them and humanity common[96] '. It is why this phenomenon is inseparable from a ' situation

‘hermeneutics’; and since this situation applies to all the People of the Book, it follows that there is something in common in the way spiritual figures and mystics have interpreted the Bible in Christianity and the Qur’an in Islam. Thus, the phenomenon of the Holy Book could be taken as the starting point for a comparative study of the spirituality and religious anthropology of the ‘People of the Book’ in the East and the West.

A principle explained by Corbin in his project of comparative hermeneutics between Swedenborg and Ismaili gnosis. The two pinnacles of Christian and Islamic gnosis are set side by side: on the one hand, the great Swedish visionary theosophist Swedenborg (1688–1772), who was ‘the prophet of the inner meaning of the Bible’, and on the other, the Shia religious phenomenon, which, whether in its Twelver or Seven-Imamite form, is based on the hermeneutics of the Qur’an and the inner meaning of the prophetic revelations s[97] .

The phenomenon of the Holy Book will also have another consequence within Islam itself and will mark the beginning of a schism between Sunni and Shia Islam, for whereas the majority of Sunni Muslims believe that, following the mission of the Seal of the Prophets, humanity has nothing new to expect, Shi’ism leaves the future open by asserting that even after the Seal of Prophecy, something is still to be expected; that the hermeneutic task, taking the place of the Prophets’ revelation, now falls to the Imams, and that they remain the ‘guardians of the Book’. That is to say, they embody the esoteric truth of the Qur’an, since humanity can never be without a mystical pole possessing the key to the mysteries of the Book.

CHAPTER II
Prophecy and *walâyat* (the Imâmat)

For this particular passage, we drew inspiration from the commentaries of Shamsoddîn Mohammad Lâhîjî (d. 1506)[98], as we had previously discussed in one of our books[99]. Lâhîjî's principal work is a monument of Iranian spirituality, a compendium of Shia Sufism in Persian, written to comment on the 'Rose Garden of Mystery' (*Golshan-e Râz*), a long poem of some thousand verses, dealing in concise and eminently symbolic aphorisms with the high doctrines of Sufism. This poem had been composed in Persian by a famous shaykh from Azerbaijan, Mahmûd Shabestarî (1320). Lâhîjî's views correspond perfectly to the spirit of prophecy and *walâyat* as understood and developed by Henry Corbin in Volume I of **En Islam iranien** (IV – Prophétologie et imâmologie, pp. 219–283) or in his other writings.

The succession of prophets stems from a covenant that was made in pre-eternity between God and the souls of mankind. God asked the souls of mankind: 'Am I not your Lord?' (Qur'an 7:171). The spirits' affirmative response constituted a Covenant of loyalty which the prophets, from Adam to Muhammad—who marks the culmination of the prophetic cycle—came to reaffirm, cycle after cycle. First consequence: Islam does not belong to history, but derives its origin from a Covenant concluded in meta-history. Second consequence: the conception of a prototype of humanity, an *Urmensch* created as an Image embodying the universality of the divine Names and Attributes and at the same time a primordial Prophet, God's representative (*khalîf*), and the Perfect Man (*al-insân al-kâmil*). This man was the first prophet, Adam, the holder and Bearer of *the Trust*, who symbolises the universality of the Names and Attributes.

The Qur'an (33:72) states in this regard: 'We offered (the trust) to the heavens, the earth and the mountains. They refused to bear it and were afraid of it, whereas man accepted it, for he is dark-hearted and ignorant.'

Third consequence: the Perfect Man is the epiphany of the Muhammadian Reality, the *Logos*, which, like a 'spermatic spirit' (Louis Massignon), is transmitted from prophet to prophet, until it reaches Muhammad, who is its perfect epiphany. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus (others add David), are the partial epiphanies of the Muhammadian light, and the cycle of being, from pre-eternity to post-eternity, is the radiance of the immense sun of Muhammadian Reality. This manifests itself in all the spiritual states of *the* great *awlîya* (the Friends of God) and the great perfected ones. Adam is the starting point of the ascent of the sun of prophecy; he is, in terms of form, the Father, although, in terms of the Spirit, he is but the son of the Muhammadian Reality. To say that Adam is the son of *the Logos* immediately reveals the pre-eternity of the latter. It was by alluding to this pre-eternity of *the Logos* manifested through the various prophets that the Prophet of Islam said:

"I was a prophet even when Adam was still in the state of water and clay."

1) The cycle of prophecy

The emergence of the cycle of prophecy is compared by spiritualists sometimes to the rising of the sun, sometimes to successive points on a circular line. From Adam, the starting point of the cycle of

prophecy, right up to Muhammad, the final point of that same cycle, the various prophets who succeeded one another were, each in their own spiritual reality, the epiphany of an attribute of Muhammadian Perfection. This partial epiphany of *the Logos* is the spiritual connection that links each of the prophets to the 'Niche of the Lights of Prophecy' (Mohammadian Reality).

The receding shadow of the sun as it moves towards the zenith symbolises a progressive manifestation of the Muhammadian Reality. At sunrise, the sun's shadow is longest, but as it ascends, its shadow shortens until it disappears at the zenith. This highest point corresponds to the full manifestation of the Muhammadian Reality; it is also the rank of the Prophet of Islam.

The sun of prophecy emerges from the depths of the mystery of Unity; then, as it ascends, manifesting itself in the form of diminishing shadows that symbolise the missions of successive prophets, it reaches the highest point of its vertical ascent, which is the mode of being of Muhammad. Having reached the degree of its ultimate perfection, the same sun, in its twilight descent towards the West, manifests itself in the form *of the awlîya* (the Friends of God). The setting of the sun represents the cycle of *walâyat*, to which we shall return below when we discuss it in the Shī'ī context.

2) The Prophet of Islam as the Seal of Prophethood

Muhammad is the Seal of Prophecy (*khâtim* al-anbiyâ'); the prophets who preceded him were, respectively, successive points in the cycle of prophecy. Each of the prophets was the manifestation of one of the attributes of perfection n[100]. Being, therefore, the final point, Muhammad is the complete manifestation of all the attributes of Perfection, corresponding to the ascending points of the preceding prophets. The ultimate flowering of the *nobowwat* is realised in the very Seal of Prophethood. Viewed from the perspective of the final cause, Muhammad is the first in knowledge and the last in action.

The sun reaching its zenith also signifies a perfect balance between the *zâhir* (the exoteric) and the *bâtin* (the esoteric), a *coincidentia oppositorum* (*had-e i'tidâl*). The absence of shadow from the sun of prophecy also signifies ontological rectitude: Muhammad is he who is established on the path of rectitude (*sirât al-mostaqîm*). He is the equilibrium of behaviours, the point balancing the two-dimensional aspect of *the zâhir* and the *bâtin*. He dwells in the station known as the 'Separation that follows union' (*farq-e ba'd* al-jam'); the degree where plural unity (*wâhidîyat*) appears within the solitary One (*fardânîyat*), where night and day, symbolising unity and multiplicity respectively, are equalised in an infallible neutrality, and where multiplicity does not veil unity, any more than the latter obscures the former.

3) *Wali, Nabi* and *Rasul*

The prophets who preceded Muhammad are called the *anbîyâ*'. The word *nabî* derives from the root *inbâ*': to announce, to bring news. *Nobowwat* is an intermediate state between *walâyat* (the esoteric realm of the Friends of God) and *risâlat*, the prophecy of God's messenger who brings a positive exoteric religion (*sharî'at*). *Walâyat* is a truth common to both *nobowwat* and *risâlat*, given that every *rasûl* is *a nabî* and every *nabî* is *a walî*; whereas not every *walî* is necessarily *a nabî*, nor is a nabî necessarily *a rasûl*.

The relationships between *walî, nabî and rasûl* offer many interesting connections:

1. Firstly, there is the two-dimensional structure of prophecy, one aspect of which is directed towards God, whilst the other is directed towards the creature[101]. The aspect directed towards God is mystical proximity

who receives divine grace and transmits it to humanity through the other aspect: the aspect turned towards God is *walâyat,* and that turned towards humanity is *nobowwat*. *Walâyat* is therefore the esoteric aspect of the exoteric, the gnostic truth (*haqîqat*) as opposed to the literal law (*sharî'at*).

2. The relationship between *walî, nabî* and *rasûl* can be illustrated by three concentric circles[102]: the centre represents *walâyat*, the second circle corresponds to *nobowwat,* and the third, outer circle symbolises *risâlat*. *Walâyat* is the aspect turned towards God; it cannot be interrupted, whereas *nobowwat,* which is the aspect turned towards the community, is transitory and therefore liable to be interrupted.

"This is why the dimension of *walayât* in a person who is both *a nabî* and *a rasûl* takes precedence over the dimensions of *nobowwat* and *risalât* in the same person e [103]." For what constitutes the spiritual reality of *the rasûl* who is simultaneously *a nabî* and *a walî* is his *walayât*, his intimacy with God.

3. But these relationships can be reversed when viewed from another perspective. The *A walî* in the strict sense is subject to the *shari'ah* of *the nabî* and the *rasûl*; for the latter combines the two roles of *nabî* and *walî*. Thus, the *nabî*, who is both *nabî* and *walî* at the same time, and the *rasûl,* who simultaneously combines the two functions of *nabî* and *walî*, have pre-eminence over the *walî* alone; but if the *walâyat* of these two were to be lacking, their *nobowwat* and their *risâlat* would suffer and could not endure.

4) The Cycle of *Walâyat*

The Friends and the close ones of God have always existed and will continue to exist in the future. The axis of the world is sustained by their eternal presence. In the sayings of the Imams collected by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 329/940) [** (104)], we find precise information on the necessity of *walâyat*. As the esoteric core of all prophetic philosophy, *walâyat* cannot be exhausted or extinguished; without it, the very foundation of the universe would be shaken. The world cannot subsist without God's Proof (*hojjat*). The Imams are those who guide mankind and lead them towards the path of God. The Proof is none other than the uninterrupted spiritual presence of the cycle of the Friends and the Near Ones of God. Lâhîjî asserts that, although the cycle of prophecy has ended and the door to divine revelations and the sending of the archangel Gabriel has been closed, inspiration (*wahy*) and the signs of God still persist. These spiritual entities depend on the cycle of *walâyat*. This is inherent in the name 'walî', which is one of the divine names: these will always be manifested and will never be interrupted[105].

But how could the cycle of *walâyat* be possible after the cycle of the Seal of Prophethood came to an end with the Prophet of Islam?

Lâhîjî, drawing on the symbolism of the sun's path from the East of the *nobowwat*, states that the light of the Muhammadian Reality appeared in the East of the *nobowwat*, reaching the zenith of the circle of prophecy; but having passed the southernmost point, this sun cast its shadow towards the West of *walâyat,* which is the esoteric aspect of *nobowwat*. In the twilight journey of the sun towards the West, the shadows symbolising the Friends of God (*awlîya*) manifested themselves, and the East and West stood in opposition; to each of the points (prophets) in the cycle of prophecy corresponded a twilight point (*walî*) in the cycle of occultation (*walâyat*). Just as these points appeared on the horizon of the world of visibility, so too did they become concealed on the horizon of the world of mystery. At the Parousia of the Twelfth Imam, Origin (*mabda'*) and Return (*ma'âd*) will be united, and the revolution of the cycle of spiritual evolution (cycle of *walâyat*) will be completed.

Each point situated to the east of the arc of *nobowwat* therefore corresponds to a counterpart situated to the west of the arc of *walâyat*.

On the prophetic side, no prophet was closer to Muhammad than Christ, and on the

the twilight West, the origin of *walayât* was ‘Alî ibn Abî Tâlib, the ‘western’ counterpart, ‘twilight’ counterpart of Jesus; and just as Jesus was endowed with divinity, so too, among the *awlîya*, ’Alî is the only one to be endowed with it.

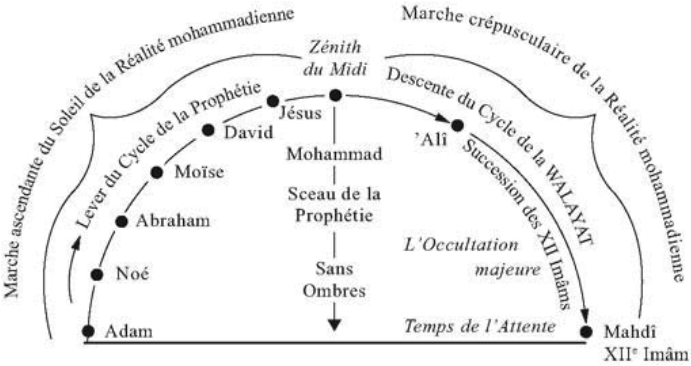


Diagram 1[106]

Just as, during the cycle of *nobowwat*, the most perfect laws were revealed through the Seal of Prophethood, so too, at the culmination of the cycle of *walâyat*, the divine mysteries and esoteric realities will reach their full flowering. Just as the prophets preceding Muhammad were but partial epiphanies of one of God’s particular attributes and names, whereas Muhammad was its total and universal manifestation, so too, in the cycle of *walâyat*, the Imams preceding the Hidden Imam (the [Twelfth]), the Mahdi, will be partial epiphanies of a particular attribute, whereas the Mahdi, who is the culmination of the cycle, will be its universal manifestation, so that the perfection of *walâyat* will blossom at its final stage. Just as all the prophets draw their ‘legislative’ light from the Niche of the lights of the *nobowwat* of the Seal of Prophethood, so too do all the *walî* draw theirs from the sun of the *walâyat* of the Seal of the *walî*.

There is a perfect correspondence between the two cycles: the eschatological counterpart of the Prophet of Islam is the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, who will bring the cycle of existence to a close; it is the expectation of this Imam, whose Parousia will reveal the esoteric truths, that makes Shi’ism a religion of eschatological expectation, centred on the spiritual hermeneutics of the truths concealed during the cycle of *walâyat*. The twelve Imams of Twelver Shi’ism, together with the Prophet and his daughter Fâtima, form the pleroma of the ‘Fourteen Most Pure’ (*ma’sûm*). As for the highly complex relationship between Shi’ism and Sufism, which exhibit such striking similarities and appear to be two names for the same thing, Henry Corbin believes that the prophetic tradition within the theosophy of Sufism seems to be “a transfer to the person of the Prophet alone of themes originally founded by Imamology[107] ”. Sufism would be a form of Shia Islam without Imamology.

Now, let us align these two cycles of prophecy and *walâyat* with the two
the arcs of the Descent and the Ascent; here is the diagram (2) we will have: we find a perfect correspondence between the cycles of the Descent and the Ascent and the two cycles of Prophecy and *walâyat*. Just as the arc of the Descent, originating at the degree of Oneness, culminates in the Perfect Man (who was the synthesis summarising all the planes of being), so too does the initial prophet (Adam, inaugurating the dawn of prophecy) culminate at the extreme point of the south, to Muhammad, who is the full manifestation of the Muhammadian Reality. And just as the Ascent begins at

Just as the journey from humanity leads to the First Source of all things, so too will the cycle of *walâyat*—which began after the sealing of the Prophetic Lineage, that is to say, with Muhammad—culminate in the Parousia of [the Twelfth]Imam. This is why the Parousia of the[Twelfth]Imam is also called *the dawn* that will first dispel the darkness of the night of the Occultatio n [108].

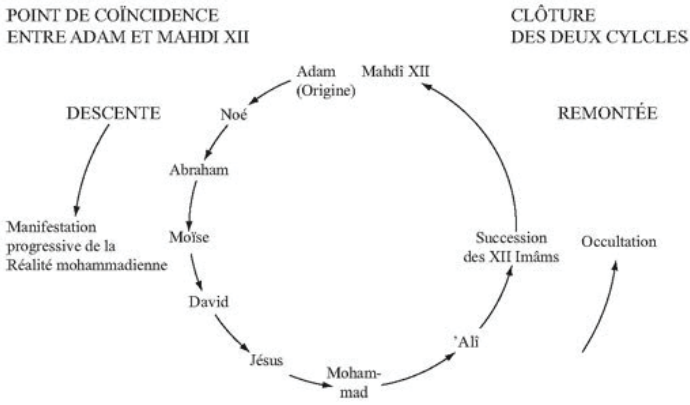


Diagram 2

5) The internalisation of the cycles of prophecy: the 'seven prophets of your being'

The correspondence between the degrees of Light and the cycles of Prophecy led Semnânî to develop a theory of seven subtle organs, each centre of which is both described as a 'prophet of one's being' and characterised by a colour—an *aura* whose visionary perception reveals to the mystic their level of progress on the spiritual path. The physiology of the man of light[109] – so important for the transmutation of the senses and the transformation of the inner being in its ascent from the well of unconsciousness to the awakening of superconsciousness – is modelled in Semnânî's work on the theory of the cycles of Prophecy. This means that the progressive manifestations of the lights, accompanied by coloured photisms, simultaneously reveal the various stations of the prophets' wisdom. Likewise, they imply the concept of a 'spiritual matter', capable of bridging the gap between what is called the Spirit and what is called Matter. There is one and the same Light, differentiated into multiple degrees of condensation and subtlety[110] .

The transformation of the events referred to in the teachings of the Qur'an (and the wisdom inherent in the various prophets) into inner events of the soul takes place by virtue of the law of correspondences. It always presupposes, by reason of *this internalisation*, a mystical anthropology.

These subtle centres, or *latîfa*, are respectively: 1) the *latîfa qâlabîya*, or subtle bodily organ, or the embryo, the 'mould' of the acquired subtle body known as the 'Adam of your being'; 2) the *latîfa nafsîya*, the lower soul, the blameworthy sub-consciousness (*nafs ammâra*) corresponding to the 'Noah of your being'; 3) the *latîfa qalbîya*, the seat of the spiritual Self, within which the embryo of a mystical posterity is formed, contained therein like a pearl in a conch shell, a posterity which will later blossom as the 'Muhammad of your being'. This is why it is designated as the 'Abraham of your being'; 4) the fourth organ (*latîfa sirrîya*) is the organ of intimate conversation and dialogue (*monâjât*); it corresponds to the 'Moses of your

‘being’; 5) the fifth organ is the centre of the Spirit, the *latîfa rûhîya*; by virtue of the nobility of its rank, it is entrusted with the divine vice-regency; it is the ‘David of your being’; 6) the centre of the mystery, the sixth organ is the *latîfa khafîya* and relates to the degree of mystery, to *the arcanum*. It is through this organ that the influence of the Holy Spirit (*Rûh al-Qods*) is received. In the hierarchy of spiritual states, ‘it will mark the access to the state of *Nabî*. It is the ‘Jesus of your being’ (*’Isâ wojûdi-ka*)[111] ”. Finally, the seventh subtle organ, the *latîfa haqqîya*, is related to “the divine centre of your being, the eternal seal of your person”. It corresponds to the “Muhammad of your being”. Corbin says on this subject: “It is this divine centre that harbours the ‘rare Muhammadian pearl’, that is to say, the subtle organ which is the True Self (*latîfa anâ’îya*), and whose embryo has begun to form in the subtle centre of the heart, the ‘Abraham of your being’[112].”

These seven *latîfa* are, moreover, aligned with the cycle of prophecy. Man progresses through these centres: at each subtle centre, the mystic experiences chromatic perceptions and visualisations that indicate the progress made and the revelations attained. By internalising the teachings of the Qur’an and the spiritual states inherent to the ranks of the prophets, the mystic thereby brings about the *reversal* of the
‘world of horizons’ into ‘world of the soul’, that is to say, it transforms itself through this reversal, which is also a *ta’wîl*. Everything pertaining to the seven prophets: the words they spoke, the events they brought about, the prophecies concerning their spiritual dignity—in short, all this is fulfilled in the subtle centres of which each of them is the embodiment. ‘Whenever in the Book you hear the words addressed to Adam,’ writes Semnânî, ‘listen to them through the corresponding organ of your subtle body (*latîfa qâlabîya*)… Meditate on what it symbolises, and be quite certain that *the esoteric meaning* of the discourse relates to *you* as a discourse concerning the *world of the soul*, just as its *exoteric* meaning relates to *Adam* as concerning the *horizons*… Only then will it be possible for you to apply the teaching of the Divine Word to yourself and to pluck it like a branch still laden with flowers[113] .”

All pilgrims on the path (*sâlikân*) perceive these lights. The light of the organ known as ‘Adam of your being’ is smoky grey; that of ‘Noah of your being’ is blue; that of ‘Abraham of your being’ is red; that of ‘Moses of your being’ is white; that of ‘David of your being’ is yellow; that of ‘Jesus of your being’ is a luminous black or the ‘black light’[114] (*aswâd nûrânî*); that of the divine centre, the ‘Mohammad of your being’, is a brilliant green, the colour of ‘emerald’. For, as Corbin concludes, quoting Semnânî, the colour green is the most appropriate for the secret of the Mystery of Mysteries (*sirr ghayb al-ghoyûh*)[(115)] . To conclude, let us add that this same idea is taken up by Sohrawardî in his ‘Account of the Western Exile’, where the ascent of the soul in Noah’s ark is a journey from prophet to prophet to reach the summit of the mystical Sinai[116] .

CHAPTER III
Prophetic philosophy

Any reflection on the essential tenets of Islam led very early on, beginning with al-Farabi, to a convergence between theology and philosophy, and to the identity of the Angel of Knowledge (for philosophers) and the Angel of Revelation (for prophets). As for the desire to associate the vocation of the philosopher with that of the prophet, Corbin considers that this above all characterises the salient and original feature of Iranian-Islamic philosophy and Iran's particular destiny within the Islamic world. Avicenna , following al-Farabi , had already outlined it, al-Suhrawardi expanded it to the dimensions of a
'conjunction' in which philosophy and mysticism became the two aspects of the same spiritual experience. Mulla Sadra provided the definitive formulation: 'Quranic Revelation,' he said, 'is the Light that enables seeing; it is like the sun that lavishes its light. Philosophical intelligence is the eye that sees this light. Without this light, one cannot see anything. But if one closes one's eyes—that is to say, if one claims to do without philosophical intelligence—this light itself will not be seen, since there will be no eyes to see it[117] ."

The equivalence between the status of the prophet and that of the philosopher had already been articulated by the renowned philosopher of the Isfahan School, Mir Fendereski (*d*. 1640), the teacher of Mulla Sadra. His illustrious work, says Corbin,
"on the part of Shi'ism, a recognition of the philosopher's vocation long claimed by philosophers (Fârâbî, Avicenna, Sohrawardî), but which was rarely granted to them in the rest of the Isla m[118] ". Mîr Fendereskî first draws distinctions: the path to knowledge for philosophers lies through reflection (*fikr*); for prophets, it lies through revelation (*wahy*) and inspiration (*ilhâm*) without the need for *fikr*. The philosopher's dialectical inquiry manifests as spontaneous blossoming in the prophet. The Shaykh outlines a whole theory of visionary experience which presupposes the idea of spiritual senses, relating to the *imaginal* world, and ultimately summarises the relationship between the prophet's knowledge and that of the philosopher as follows: 'where the philosopher reaches his final destination, there begins prophecy[119]'.

He does, however, acknowledge philosophers as minor prophets, that is to say, the rank of
unappointed prophets (*ghayr-e morsal*), who rank below the prophets sent to save the community. Mîr Fendereskî's conception of the philosopher can therefore 'only be understood in reference to the philosopher whose philosophy is precisely the path towards "prophetic philosophy", to those who follow the path of *Ishrâq*, and of whom some, indeed, attain the degrees of *walâyat*, because their path is that of the prophets and they are on a par with the perfect ones among the pilgrims of the Muhammadian path[120] ".

In this way, the antagonism between theology and philosophy is overcome: they merge into the
crucible of 'divine wisdom' (*hikmat ilâhîya*), which thus culminates in a prophetic philosophy. Wise men and prophets are in agreement because they have both drawn from the 'Niche of the Lights of Prophecy'. What distinguishes the sent prophet (*rasûl*) from a wise man is that the prophet is charged with the imperative task of proclaiming a message (*risâla*) before mankind. "But since the supreme stage where philosophical knowledge culminates in mystical experience (among the *Ishrâqîyûn*) causes the spiritual to undergo the same celestial ascent (*mi'râj*) as the *Nabî* and makes him, mystically, in turn, the 'Seal of Prophecy', the Angel of Knowledge is none other than the Angel of Revelatio n[121]."

The ultimate aim of such a prophetic philosophy is a mystical experience, the very one that is the lot of the prophets. It is, therefore, a *process of individuation;* it is realised in the 'one-on-one' encounter between the Angel-Holy Spirit and the philosopher, without any human mediation, even that of a Church122 . This has several consequences: 1) prophetic philosophy is the opposite of the double truth; 2) it requires angelology; 3) it rejects incarnation and the historicism that follows from it; 4) it expands into the cycle of *walâyat* and presupposes, if only implicitly, Shia Islam.

1) The conjunction of the philosopher and the *Nabî*, an antidote to the double truth

Thanks to the triumph of Averroism in the West (see Book III), the separation of faith and knowledge, theology and philosophy, was to lead to the coexistence of two contradictory orders of reality; something may be true theologically and false philosophically, and *vice versa*. This separation was known in the West as the *'double truth'* and, via the Averroists of the University of Paris, led to what was later called the Latin Averroism of the School of Padua. But the fate of philosophy in Iran was quite different, where Averroes and Averroism were entirely unknown. The sage and the prophet drew from the same source of inspiration, were fellow witnesses to the same experience, companions on the same journey. Whilst the Prophet's ascent (*mi'râj*) served as a model for all vertical progression towards the spirit, the idea of the Return took on, for the mystic, the meaning of an assumption, just as the philosopher, illuminated by the Angel of Knowledge, traversed the same stages, beginning with his 'Western exile'. All spirituality centred on the figure of the Prophet. The shared vocation of the sage and the prophet meant that, at the end of his ascent, any philosopher worthy of the name experienced the Seal of Prophecy, attained the state of *nabî*, and encountered his 'Perfect Nature' (Angel) in the same way that the Prophet encountered the Angel Gabriel. The philosopher knew that what he contemplated as Ideas was the equivalent of that very thing which was revealed to the prophet in *Images* and visionary narratives. Henceforth, any rift between religion and philosophy was dispelled; religion remained just as philosophical as philosophy remained 'religious', that is to say, essentially centred on the study of prophecy[123] .

2) Prophetic philosophy and angelology

A prophetic religion cannot survive without angelology, since it is the Angel who acts as the mediator and initiator of the prophets. A 'prophetic philosophy' places the philosopher in the same position as the prophet, and thereby frees him from any human magisterium n[124] . Angelology is as fundamental and necessary for Judaism and Islam as is the study of prophecy. It was just as necessary, Corbin maintains, for prophetic-type Christianity, for the Christology of *Christos Angelos*[125] . But by embarking on the path of Paulinism and the dogma of the divine incarnation, Christianity lost, in a sense, the theophanic function of the Angel, once the incarnation as a chronologically traceable historical fact took precedence over the theophany. On the other hand, it is because there is a negative theology, presupposing beyond being a super-being (*hyperousion*) unknowable beyond all manifestation and determination, that angelology finds its raison d'être. It is precisely this that motivates angelology among Gnostic philosophers, and the Imamology of Shi'ite thinkers. Both the Imam and the Angel assume the theophanic function, translating it into an affirmative theology without which there would be no *Deus revelatus*[126], for *the Imam*, just as much as the Angel (or the inner guide in general), is the guarantor of affirmative theology. These two aspects of theology

The negative and affirmative aspects, which complement one another, constitute what Corbin calls the 'paradox of monotheism'. A theology without angelology degenerates into an abstract monotheism, where all mediation between the One and the many is suspended, where the divine is lost in the abstraction of absence; but reduced to the sole dimension of anthropomorphism, it degenerates into metaphysical idolatry. *Angelology* leaves the field open to the occult dimension of *the Deus absconditus*. It thus allows for the 'phenomenon of the mirror' and, as an anonymous Sufi explains, 'the prophet, whenever he needs to, turns the mirror of his soul (*âyîna-ye jân, speculum animae*) towards the holy world, to receive from it knowledge, the True Reality (*haqîqat*) '[127].

The mystical experience of the prophet or philosopher can only take place through the presence of the Angel, his guide. It is the result of an angelic pedagogy which, through the encounter with the Angel, brings about Individuation. This *inner guide* may take on various and diverse Names, such as the Angel Gabriel, the Crimson Archangel, the Invisible Master, Perfect Nature (Sohrawardî and the Hermetic tradition); the Celestial Partner (according to the Gnostic tradition); the Celestial Twin (Manichaeism), Hayy ibn Yaqzân (Avicenna).

But its function is the same: to awaken the soul, a stranger in this world, and to bring about the encounter with the true Self. It is the dual aspect of this conjunction that gives rise to individuation, the blossoming of the polar dimension of being. It is the celestial counterpart of the soul that manifests itself to the pilgrim in singularibus. And Corbin concludes: 'Just as the concept of prophetic religion implies the necessity of angelology, so too is the latter all the more necessary for the mystical philosopher to be able to repeat the stages of the Prophet's ascent, in other words, for the idea we have emphasised several times here—that of the vocation shared by philosopher and prophet—to be realised. Both receive their Light from the same 'Niche of the Lights of Prophecy' (*Meskât al-nobowwat*)[128].'

3) Rejection of the Incarnation and of historicism

The Incarnation is a unique and irreversible event: God in the flesh becomes incarnate at a specific moment in history. The place and date of the Incarnation become a point of reference par excellence. 'Whilst the idea of the Incarnation posits a material event embedded within the fabric of historical events and chronology, and grounds in it that ecclesial reality which sociological monism will secularise as "social Incarnation", on the other hand, what the theophanic idea calls for… is a heavenly assumption of man, a return to a time that is not the time of history and its chronology. The recurrence of theophanies, the perpetuation of their mystery, posits neither an ecclesial reality nor a dogmatic magisterium, but the virtue of the revealed Book, as the "symbol" of an eternal Word, always capable of producing new creations[129] . »

In prophetic philosophy, the essential events unfold in a *transhistorical* dimension; an *'elsewhere'* that is *reversible*: it can always burst into the world and reveal the eschatological aspect of things. This 'elsewhere' unveils the invisible that lies hidden within every projected Image, that is to say, the Angel. The philosopher does not see the Angel but understands through him to the extent of his effort; the Imams hear him; the prophets see him. Whatever the source of their knowledge—revelation (*wayh*), inspiration (*ilhâm*) or the illuminating understanding of the active Intellect—knowledge is gnosis, a lifting of the veil, a science of the heart purified to the extreme, capable of reflecting supersensible lights, yet a science that remains essentially angelic. And for the theophanic relationship of any science of the heart to be revealed, it requires a world that ontologically guarantees it full rights. This intermediate world between the sensible and the intelligible is

the realm where ‘bodies become spiritual and spirits take on bodily form’, that is to say, a world freed from the laws of matter, though not from spatial extension, and possessing all the ‘imaginative’ richness of the sensible world in an incorruptible state. At this intermediate level, the metahistory of ‘events in Heaven’ unfolds: the visions of mystics and prophets. It is also this interworld ‘that prevents us from confusing an *icon*—precisely a metaphysical image—with an idol[130]’. In the absence of this world, not only does man fall freely from *metahistory* into history, not only does he lose his *vision* to become merely a ‘visual’ man, but he becomes entangled in metaphysical idolatry; or rather, ‘we remain doomed to *the imprisonment* of the one-dimensional History of empirical events. ‘Events in Heaven’ (divine birth, birth of the soul, for example) no longer concern us, because we no longer look upon them[131] ”.

But to rediscover the gaze from beyond, the gaze of the ‘events in Heaven’, is tantamount to regaining the polar dimension and taking part in the primordial events. All prophetic philosophy refers not to a particular historical event, such as the Incarnation, but to prophetic *hierognosis* as it was revealed on the Day of the Covenant. And every Revelation that is a descent (*tanzîl*) corresponds to a *return* (*ta’wîl*) to those very events, or even an Ascent to the source from which this Revelation descended. This is why every prophetic philosophy is also a *Ma’âd*, a Return, or even a
‘philosophy of resurrection’. Qâzî Sa’îd Qommî (born 1633), for his part, believed that the thoughts of the ancient philosophers, although they were well versed in negative theology (*tanzîh*), fell short of the mark. They were likewise unable to traverse the stages of resurrection (*Ma’âd*) because ‘they did not seek the lights of wisdom (*anwâr al-hikmat*) from the City of Wisdom (*madinat al-hikmat*), which is the Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets[132] ’. As for their successors, the Peripatetics of Islam, they were equally incapable of explaining a ‘philosophy of resurrection’: ‘Unable to conceive of the idea of an “immaterial body”, that of *the mundus imaginalis*, these philosophers fled from anything that might remind them of the wretched condition of the material body in this world, and most professed the idea of a purely spiritual (*rûhânî*) *Ma’âd*. Thus they were reduced to transforming all revealed data concerning paradise and hell into allegories[133], because they were unaware that the *’âlam al-mithâl* is the world where the literal meaning becomes the spiritual meaning (…). On the other hand, there were philosophers who kindled (their knowledge) at the Niche of Light (*miskhât*) of the final prophecy and at the *walâyat ’alawîy a* [134] .” These are therefore the Shî’ite philosophers whose “prophetic philosophy” (*hikmat nabawîya*), guided by the Imâms
“defines Shia Islam as the esoteric dimension of the Islamic religion”[135] .

4) Prophetic philosophy and Shia Islam

The Imam, as the pre-eminent interpreter of the Book, becomes an essential tenet of prophetic philosophy. And it is this acute awareness of the end of prophecy and the concomitant conviction that humanity cannot survive without the presence of prophets that determines, says Corbin,
‘the poignant sentiment of Shi’ism’; a sentiment all the more acute as it leads to an eschatological expectation and the parousia of the awaited Imam, currently hidden, whose parousia will bring the cycle of our *Aeon* to a close.

All the great Iranian Shī’ite thinkers, such as Mulla Sadra Shirazi (1640), Mohsen Fayz (d. 1680), Qazi Sa’id Qommi (1639) and many others, have all explored philosophy in the sense of a ‘prophetic and imamite philosophy ’ (*hikmat nabawîya wa ’alawîya*, the latter adjective being derived from the word *walî-Imâm*), or as ‘Yemeni theosophy’ (*hikmat yamanîya*) by allusion to the symbolic meanings of Yemen and the Yemeni corner of the *Ka’ba*; hence this tradition in which the

resonance between the words *îmân*, faith, and *Yaman*, Yemen: ‘Faith comes from Yemen, and wisdom, theosophy, is Yemeni e[136] .’

Whether we are dealing with ‘Yemeni theosophy’ or ‘Eastern theosophy’, they both draw from the same source: the *hadiths* relating to the cycle of the Friends of God, to the Imam as the Face of God. Thus the philosophy of a Sadrâ culminates in a philosophy of witnessing which, “by positing the unity of the contemplator and that which he contemplates, determines the act of being, of existing, in terms of Presence, that is to say, in terms of the presences of the soul in ever more univers[es137] ” – presences that extend beyond death. For the more intense the being, the more the soul is Presence to other worlds, the more it is absence in death. The mediating function of the Angel as a spiritual guide bringing about the inner metamorphosis of the soul influenced in Sadrâ the ‘substantial mutation’ of the intrasubstantial movement which reaches as far as the substance of being, in its immense surge of Return to God. Therein lies the place where the final point of the Ascension (*Ma’âd*) meets the initial point of the Descent (*Mabdâ’*) of Being, where the two arcs of descent and return converge, where the descent of the Word (*tanzîl*) and its ascent (*ta’wîl*) come together in the ‘Niche of the Lights of Prophecy’.

CHAPTER IV
Shi'ism

'Shi'ism fundamentally and rightfully constitutes the esotericism or inner meaning of the Islamic religion; this esotericism or inner meaning is, from the outset and in its entirety, the teaching into which the Imams initiated their disciples and which the latter have passed on (…). The concept of these witnesses who, even though completely ignored by the masses, from generation to generation, 'stand in for' God in this world, encompasses the idea of a spiritual community whose hierarchy is founded, not on the precedence of an external social order, but solely on the qualities of the inner being. Thus, it eludes all materialisation and all socialisation. The "Caliphs of God" on Earth, of whom the first Imam speaks, were first and foremost the eleven Imams, his successors, and further still, all those whose invisible succession maintains the pure hierarchy centred on the one who is its mystical "pole", the "Hidden Imam", until the end of our *Aeon*; without them, humanity, whether it knows it or not, could not continue to exist. And it is ultimately here that the meaning and the stakes of Shi'ism's spiritual struggle are decided[138] ."

Shi'ism is therefore 1) the esoteric aspect of Islam; it arises from the completion of the prophetic message; 2) it is consequently centred on the mediating and hermeneutic function of the Imam, hence the paramount importance of the term *ta'wîl* in Imamology; 3) as the vocation of Shi'ism is that of a spiritual community centred on love, it is oriented from the outset towards interiority and refuses to reduce Islam to the exteriority of the *Shari'a*. Hence the uncompromising stance of Shia Islam towards Sunni Islam, exoteric Shia theologies, and a certain form of Sufism. This constitutes the threefold struggle of Shia Islam.

1) Shi'ism or the Esotericism of Islam

Shi'ism arose from a fundamental question, posed in light of the very tragedy of the conclusion of the prophetic message. Now that the last of the Prophets has died and the Seal of Prophethood has been closed, and since humanity cannot survive without a Guardian of God, what will become of the believer? Furthermore, if the meaning of the Book is not limited to its literal sense, who will now ensure its understanding? It is necessary that, after the Prophet, there be a 'Preserver of the Book' (*Qayyim bi'l-Kitâb*)[139], someone who can initiate us into its inner meaning. This is why Shi'ism holds that the cycle of prophecy was succeeded by the 'cycle of *walâyat*'.

Thus the message is internalised and transmitted through the Imams, and this continues to the present day. Let us now look at the major periods of Shia Islam.

The first period begins with the first Imam, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). He was the confidant of the Prophet of Islam's secrets. It is said that the Prophet remarked of him: "I am the City of Knowledge; 'Alī is its gate." ' This period extends to the year marking the 'Great Occultation' of the$^{\text{Twelfth}}$Imam, that is, 329/940. It is also the year in which the great compiler Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni died; he collected from the last representatives of the TwelfthImam, the *hadiths* constituting the oldest collection of Shia traditions. A second period extends from Kolaynî to Nasîroddîn Tûsî (d. 1270), who was also involved in Ismaili Shia Islam. This period is

marked, says Corbin, 'by the development of major collections of Shī'ī traditions, works devoted to specific themes, and the great Shī'ī *tafsīr* or commentaries on the Qur' n [140]'. A third period extends from Tûsî (following the Mongol invasion) to the Safavid era, at the beginning of the 16th century. It is marked by the significant work of Haydar Amolî, who sought to reconcile Sufism and Shi'ism by establishing a comprehensive form of Shi'ism. The fourth period begins with the Safavid era (from the 'School of Isfahan'), dominated by Mîr Dâmâd and his pupils, and, encompassing the Qajar period, extends to the present day.

2) Shi'ism and *ta'wîl*

We noted earlier that the prophetic function was to facilitate the 'revelation' (*tanzîl*) of the Book and the manifestation of its external, exoteric meaning. By turning inwards, Shī'ism brings about a reversal, fulfilling the complementary function to revelation, which is *a return* to the inner self. To effect this return is what the word *ta'wîl* etymologically denotes: 'to lead back to the source' and to provide a spiritual interpretation of the apparent meaning of the Letter. This hermeneutics falls to the Imam, because he is, in the absence of the Prophet, 'the sole Guarantor of God'.

However, by inverting the meaning, Shi'ism thereby escapes the historical sense—if by 'historical' we mean the shell or 'the ambiguous appearance of a hidden hierostory whose events possess the reality and perpetuity of *the mysterium liturgicu m* [141]'. Thus, because Shi'ism relates events in Heaven and preserves the eminently symbolic meaning of the Images that reflect its reality, it accords a no less essential role to the supersensible faculties of man, such as divine Inspiration and the active Imagination. Consequently, 'we have had to say that all the social and political explanations by which one has sought to explain Shia Islam in terms of the laws of historical causality are explanations that miss the mark when it comes to the essence of Shia thought and the object of Shia consciousness, because the time of the Imamat remains between the time[142] …'.

However, precisely because of its esoteric nature, Shi'ism has remained, at least in spirit –
since we know that it later became the official religion of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, and that today it claims even more – the religion of an elite. The Imams, hunted down and persecuted by worldly powers, have always led a secluded life, sheltered from power, and have never ceased to repeat: 'Our cause is difficult and heavy to bear; only a close angel, a sent prophet, or a faithful one of proven heart is capable of it' [(143)] . ' This attitude has given the Imams the solitary appearance of expatriates, of exiles, because the Imam knows the way back to the true homeland of Being; he devotes his entire life to the spiritual guidance of his followers. Hence the praise of exile. "Islam began in exile and will return to exile as it was in the beginning. Blessed are those among the community of Muhammad who go into exile (the *ghorabâ*)[144].

This inclination towards the inner life of the spirit also explains the attitude of Shi'ism towards others religions. Since *walâyat* also encompasses the son of Adam, Seth, the religion of *walâyat* is thus shared by all the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition.

*a) The six days of creation (*the Hexaemeron*)*

The idea of a cycle of perpetual prophecy beginning at the dawn of humanity on earth and lasting until the appearance of the Resurrecting Imam at the end of time has led Shia Islam to interpret *the* mystical *hexaêmeron*, that is, the six days of the creation of religions corresponding to the six Abrahamic prophets. *Walâyat* coincides, thanks to the complete revolution of the cycle of prophecy,

with the Dawn of the Final Hour (Resurrection). This idea had already been formulated by the great Ismaili theosophist Nasir-e Khosraw (11th century), and would also be articulated by Haydar Amoli (14th century), the reconciler of Twelver Shi'ism and Sufism, and was taken up by another branch of late Shi'ism, namely Shaykhiism in the 19th century, notably in the work of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î, who was the founder of the Shaykhi School e[145] .

In Ismaili Gnosticism, *the Hexaêmeron* represents the six days of the creation of the cosmos, or, if you will, of the sacred and religious universe (*'âlam al-Dîn*) of spiritual humanity. These six days are the six periods of our current cycle, each marked by the name of its prophet: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad. Each religion derives its meaning from the final day. 'If men sought,' says Nâsir-e Khosraw, 'this spiritual hermeneutics, the prophetic religions would each stand in the place where they have stood, for the Christians stood on the fifth day, the Jews on the fourth day, the Mazdeans (*Moghân*) on the third day[146] . "The day of a prophet is that prophet's specific period within this cycle, 'from the moment of his raising until the advent of the Imam who brings this period to a close'[147] ". We are on the sixth day of creation; the 'seventh day' (the *Sabbath*) will be the advent of the Imam of the Resurrection (*Qâ'im al-Qiyâmat*). The person of the last Imam embodies the six days of prophecy, just as the form of a solid object encapsulates its six faces[148]. The entire sacred history of humanity (the six millennia which, in Ismaili Shi'ism, mark the cycle of prophecy) tends towards the coming of this perfect human Form that is the Resurrecting Imam. Similarly, in Twelver Shi'ism, the first legislation, that of Adam, was the inaugural legislation, whilst that of Muhammad, on the sixth day, was the final legislation. Time is brought back to its 'initial point from which it began and to which the time or cycle of prophecy is brought back, and from which the time of the cycle of *walâyat* then begins[(149)] ". Thus, having reached the end of *time*, prophecy rises again, but this time in the form of the last Imam, the *Master of the Age*, who is the eschatological counterpart of the last Prophet: he is, therefore, the Imam of the Resurrection. In the context of Ismailism as much as in that of Twelver Shi'ism, the Return of the time of prophecy to its initial point *spatialises* the time of the Imam of the Resurrection, and, by converting the successive into the simultaneous, it puts an end to the conflict between space and time. Moreover, as Corbin points out, in the work of a Christian mystic such as Swedenbor g [150], the six days, by virtue of being internalised, represent the six stages of the creation of the spiritual man; the 'seventh day' is that of the heavenly man, typifying *the Antiquissima Ecclesia*[151].

b) Salman the Persian, the Archetype of the Expatriate

Shi'ism, due to its praise of exile and its natural inclination towards the esoteric, has made the enigmatic figure of the Iranian Salmân the Persian, or Salmân the Pure, the archetype of the stranger.

A strange fate indeed for this son of a Persian knight from the province of Fars (ancient Persis). He was raised in Zoroastrianism under the name Rûzbeh Marzûbân. He became a Christian for a time, then, travelling from town to town, he frequented great masters of asceticism; having heard of the Prophet of Islam, he set out to find him in Mecca and never parted from him again. He became the Prophet's confidant and close companion, to such an extent that the Prophet said of him:
"Salman is one of us, a member of the Family. " On this subject, Haydar Amolî emphasises: "The adoption of Salmân implies that the term 'Family', or 'House' (*Bayt*), does not refer to the external, physical family (*bayt sûrî*), comprising both wives and children, but to the 'Family of Knowledge, Gnosis and Wisdom' (*Bayt al-'ilm wa'l-ma'rifat wa'l-hikmat*)[152] ."

On the other hand, it was Salmân who is said to have helped the Prophet to become aware of the scriptural background to his revelations. He is said to have been Islam's most original exponent of *ta'wîl*, and 'it was in this capacity that he came to be seen as truly embodying the name of Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation. Or rather, he would be, in a sense, the Angel of this angel, an individuation of the Angel of Revelatio n [153]…". It follows from this "angelic ministry" of Salmân that the phenomenon of *ta'wîl* dates back to the very origins of Islam, as at least the Shī'ite esotericists profess. Being both the Stranger emerging from 'his Western exile' and the hermeneutist who initiates the Prophet into the scriptural antecedents of his revelations, making him aware of the 'exemplary moral dilemmas' of earlier prophet [154] , Salmân the Persian symbolises pure spiritual Islam, free from any narrow-minded or legalistic pretensions, from any particular ethnic ties, and from any flesh-and-blood human lineage. This is why 'great has been the significance of this motif of the Stranger (*gharîb*) in gnosis as well as in Islamic mysticism. The feeling of exile fuels the passionate devotion of Shi'ism to the cause of the Imam, as well as the fervour of Sufi vocations. Both are conscious of all that is typified by the case of Salmân, the Stranger who came from distant shores, the one marked by the Seal of a pure spiritual Islam in the famous saying of Imam Ja'far preserved in the *hadith*: 'Islam began as an exile and shall return to being an exile, just as it began; blessed are those among the members of the community of Muhammad who go into exile t [155] .'

3) The Threefold Struggle of Shi'ism

Spiritual Shi'ism has always rebelled against a social religion, against the reduction of the spirit to any temporal order, to an ideology. In extolling the virtues of the exile, the Imam exhorts the faithful to renounce all the ephemeral values of this world in order to 'make this world the field of their migration towards that which is already invisibly present in this world, the world of palingenesis and the Resurrection of which the Imam is the herald. To use modern parlance, let us say that this is the only 'presence in the world', the only 'commitment' in this world, for the spiritual pilgrim as a witness to the absol u[156] ."

In the person of the Hidden Imam who remains, as we shall soon see, *in the meantime*, Shi'ism senses the mystery of human existence, just as this had once been sensed in Zoroastrianism in the person of the Saviour (*Saoshyant*), in Buddhism in the person of the Buddha Maitreya, and in the expectation of the reign of the Holy Spirit among Christian mystics since the Joachimites in the 13th century[157] .

It is against this backdrop that the threefold struggle of Shi'ism comes into focus: a) firstly, an open confrontation with Sunni Islam as a religion of pure *Sharia*, that of the jurists who reject gnosis; b) there is a second struggle, 'more painful and more poignant[158] " than the first, since it is waged from within Shia Islam itself. This is the struggle we are witnessing at present in Iran, where Shia Islam, triumphing in an 'Islamic Republic', distorts the very spirit of a religion that is, above all, esoteric and a religion of love. This has a long history in Islam, and in Iran in particular. This antagonism has pitted the inquisitors and censors against the sages, the 'faithful of love'. Since the Safavid era, it has manifested itself in the conflict between the *'Orafâ'*, the Gnostics faithful to the esoteric teachings of the Imams, and the *Foqahâ'*, the theologians who outwardly profess Shi'ism but readily disregard its esoteric teachings; c) Finally, there is an 'even[159]more subtle struggle 'which pits spiritual Shi'ism against a certain form of Sufism that has forgotten its origins. This theme was developed by Haydar Amolî in his commentaries. It should be noted, however, that Shi'ism was integrated into philosophical thought (see *below*, Book III) and culminated in the great synthesis of Mollâ

Sadrâ, when Shi'ite spirituality, the metaphysics of being and *Ishrâq* merged into the unity of the spiritual consciousness of the Shi'ite *Ishrâqî*.

a) Shi'ism and Sunni Islam

The major difference between Shi'ism and Sunni Islam from a theosophical perspective, says Corbin, 'could be reduced to the fact that everything which Shi'ite gnosis "intends" in the person of the Imam as a pole is, in Sunni Islam, invested solely in the person of the Prophet160'. Consequently, this results in an imbalance.

What is first and foremost referred to as *Shi'ism* in relation to Sunni Islam is the entirety of the faithful who rally to the teachings of the holy Imams regarding all matters pertaining to the hermeneutics of the Qur'an and the practice of religion. As for the meaning of the word *sunna* (tradition), the Shia also use it, but for them this term refers to the complete Tradition encompassing the entire *corpus* of the teachings of the twelve Imams.

According to Corbin, the underlying idea behind the distinction between the two branches of Islam is this: Sunni Islam holds that the Prophet Muhammad (d. 11/632), having revealed the final religious law, brought the 'cycle of prophecy' to a close. He declared that he was the last of the Prophets, the 'Seal of Prophecy', and that after him there would be no further new legislation. The religious history of humanity is closed. Shi'ism holds that whilst it is true that Muhammad was the last prophet, the religious history of humanity is not thereby closed. The end point of the 'cycle of prophecy' coincides with the starting point of a new cycle, that of initiation or the '*cycle of walâyat*'. The word *walâyat* means friendship (Persian *dûstî*). It refers, on the one hand, to the affection and love that followers profess towards the Imams, and, on the other hand, to the divine favour which, from pre-eternity, qualifies and sanctifies them as the 'Friends of God', the Near Ones or the Beloved of God (*Awliyâ'Allâh*)(161) .

Thus, by turning to the Prophet, the Shia believer turns to the very one whom the Prophet himself had announced as his descendant and the future Seal of *walâyat*. In this way, the faithful and the followers of the Imâm are no longer bound by a predetermined destiny, but rather embrace the true prophetic message. They turn towards the one who will not bring a new *Shari'ah* but will unveil the hidden meaning of all past Revelations. "The existential situation is fundamentally different in Shi'ism and in Sunni Islam162."

Shi'ism's distinctive stance regarding the esoteric meaning of the Book, the loving devotion it bears to the Imams, and the eschatological dimension in which the saviour is revealed mean that Shi'ism refuses to regard its future as lying behind it. Unlike mainstream Sunni Islam, for which, after the Seal of Prophecy, humanity has no further dreams to await, 'Shi'ism keeps the future open by professing that even after the coming of the "Seal of the Prophets", something is still to be awaited, namely the revelation of the spiritual meaning of the revelations brought by the great prophets (…). But this spiritual understanding will only be complete at the end of our *Aeon*, at the parousia of the Twelfth Imam, the currently hidden Imam and mystical pole of this world163 ".

b) Shi'ism and the exoteric theologians (foqahâ')

How did Shi'ism, which was centred on the esoteric meaning of the Book, come to produce a legalistic religion, 'increasingly devoted exclusively to the practical questions of canon law, jurisprudence and casuistry, and suspicious of anything to do with philosophy or mystical theosophy164 '?

This remains the great paradox of Shi'ism. One need only read the *ghazals* of Hafez (14th century) and the poets who preceded him to realise that this antagonism has a long history in Iranian thought. Whilst in its early days Shi'ism tended to side with the mystics and the oppressed in its struggle against the Sunni legal scholars, later, having become the official religion under the Safavid dynasty, it would adopt towards the spiritual masters (*'orafâ'*) the very same stance that the legal scholars had once taken towards it. "Shi'ite gnosis, which had successfully weathered several centuries of persecution and clandestinity, found itself, with the temporal success of Shi'ism, facing a new kind of ordeal[165]." How did we get to this point? Why this increasingly intrusive, cumbersome dominance of canon law?

This escalation in *fiqh* undoubtedly dates back to the time when Shi'ism became the state religion; no doubt, in clinging to power and assuming legal responsibilities, Shi'ism had to establish, in order to carry out its temporal functions, an official clergy increasingly concerned with regulating worldly affairs and less and less open to gnosis and the teachings of the holy Imams. Ismailism had to face this very paradox from the 10th to the 12th century of the Christian era, during the triumph of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt; whilst Twelver Shi'ism faced it from the beginning of the 16th century, that is to say from the moment when Shah Ismā'īl, founder of the Safavid dynasty, in restoring the national unity of Persia, made Twelver Shi'ism the official state religion.

By becoming a temporal power, true Shi'ism 'must, in a sense, conceal itself from itself'; that is to say, in order to preserve its integrity, it must, in a sense, conceal itself from official Shi'ism l [166] . If, from the outset, Shi'ism regarded itself as the living conscience of the esoteric dimension of the prophetic message, and if this conscience was accompanied by a sense of exile due to its association with temporal powers, an official Shi'ism emerged which "exiled the exiles of the Imam[167] ". Shi'ism thus turned against itself and made its followers exiles within their own religion. One might cite in this regard the indictment by Nasir-e Khosraw against the jurists: "Satan (Iblîs) is indeed a theologian (exotericist) if those (the doctors of the Law) are theologians"; then, going even further, he adds, "because these so-called scholars have branded as enemies of the faith all those who possess scientific knowledge of created things, those who seek the how and the why have fallen silent. (…) There remains no one in this land (Khorasan) which we have just mentioned who is capable of *uniting* the science of the eternal Religion, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, with the science of created things, which in turn depends on philosophy; for philosophy, in the eyes of these so-called scholars, is reduced to the level of animals, whilst through the fault of these people it is the religion of Islam that has become an object of contempt. These so-called scholars have declared that the philosopher is an enemy of the faith, so much so that in this country there remains neither True Religion nor philosophy[168] . ' One is struck by the relevance of these words today. It seems that not only have things not improved since then, but they have actually worsened if one considers the damage of all kinds inflicted upon people, upon culture, and upon the very dignity of belief—and all this, as ever, *ad majorem gloriam Dei*.

Can a Shia state exist without contradicting the very spirit of Shia Islam? If Shi'ism is a religion of eschatological expectation, does the founding of a state, whatever its form, not pre-empt the mission of the Twelfth Imam, whose coming at the end of our cycle is to establish divine justice on Earth? Corbin died before the creation of the Islamic Republic; we do not know what his judgement would have been regarding an esoteric religion of love that degenerated into an oppressive totalitarian regime of the sort found in the Third World.

On the subject of the 'spiritual struggle' of Shi'ism, Corbin holds the following view: for 'authentic' Shi'ism

Any political ambition claiming the caliphate is unthinkable; 'the very idea would be an unbearable blasphem e[169]'. But now that 'this unbearable blasphemy' has come to pass in history, what will now be the spiritual struggle of Shi'ism? Faced with this dilemma, Corbin might have presented us with this alternative: 'either abandonment, the radical socialisation of the spiritual, succumbing to the lure of the will to power and making pacts with 'powers' that sometimes do not even know what the word 'spiritual' means, and at other times ruin its meaning all the more effectively because they have known it, for it is not the unbeliever, but the believer alone who can desecrate and blaspheme. Or faith in *the* divine *incognito*, even if through a *desperatio fiducialis* (a despair that retains confidence), the sense of this *incognito* perpetuated as a challenge and typified, par excellence, in the person of the Twelfth Imam, the Hidden Imam, because, in this case, religious reality can neither be an object nor be objectified, nor socialised nor collectivised. The believer inspired by such faith will resolve for himself the problems posed to him, in the present world, by his fidelity to the prescriptions of the *Shari'ah*. His struggle will be victoriou x[170] .

Whether or not the Shia believer triumphs over this final ordeal—which, in all its horror, is the experience of a religious state—one thing is certain: Shia Islam will bear the brunt of this unfortunate adventure; and even if Shi'ism, as a legalistic religion, survives this traumatic ordeal, it will never be the same, for something has been broken, a barrier has been crossed that cannot be crossed with impunity without creating an irreversible situation. Perhaps, after falling into this trap of history, spiritual Shi'ism will rediscover its original vocation, which is to be the religion of the exiles.

c) Shi'ism and Sufism

The relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism has not been a straightforward one. The Shi'ites have been fiercely critical of the Sufis, whilst the Sufis have railed against the Shi'ites. The issue was finally resolved by Haydar Amolî (born in 1320). Author of **The Text of Texts** (**Nass al-Nosûs**)[171] , written as a commentary on Ibn 'Arabî's **Fusûs al-Hikam**, Haydar Amolî revisits the relationship between Sufism and Shi'ism in another book entitled **Jâmi' al-Asrâr**[(172)] in which he addresses the serious question of *the* 'Seal of walâyat', which he considers decisive for the Imamology of Shia Islam. Just as Sohrawardî had attempted to integrate the Wisdom of the ancient Persians into Islamic philosophy, so too does Haydar Amolî bridge the gap between Shi'ism and the speculative gnosis of Sufism, particularly that of Ibn 'Arabî, thereby creating an integral form of Shi'ism. Haydar Amolî first explains the common origin of the two doctrines: '… among all the branches of Islam and the various Muslim groups, there is no group that has reviled the Sufis as much as the Shia have; conversely, no group has interpreted the Shia as the Sufis have. And this, despite the fact that both groups share the same origin; that the source from which they draw their inspiration is the same; that the term to which they refer is one and the same. Indeed, the term to which all Shi'ites refer, particularly the Twelver Imamite group, is none other than the person of the Commander of the Faithful (the first Imam) and, after him, his children and the children of his children (the other eleven Imams). It is he who is the source from which they derive their origin and from which they draw their sustenance; he is the foundation of their knowledge, the term to which their principles refer. The same is true of the authentic Sufis (*al-sûfiyat al-haqqa*), for the one upon whom they base their knowledge and to whom they trace their initiation (their *khirqa*, their 'cloak' of Sufism) is none other than the first Imam, and after him, one following the other, his children and the children of his [children173] ."

> The Sufi is a stranger, an exile in this world. He longs to find his 'home' and put an end to his Western exile. The religious law revealed by the Prophet opens the inner path (*tarîqat*), which

leads to spiritual truth (*harîqat*), which, when lived intensely by the Sufi, makes him a metaphysically free man. 'The mystical vocation is not opposed to prophetic revelation: it is its fulfilment, because it is its secret truth '[174]. " The Sufi is thus transformed internally: he transforms his lower self (*nafs ammâra*) into a pacified soul (*nafs motma'yanna*). The outcome of this struggle, which is a kind of sublimation, is the transition from exoteric unity to esoteric unity: "the abstract monotheism of exoteric *tawhîd* is resolved through the idea, or rather through the experience, of theophany (*tajallî*)[175] ". As long as the veil interposed between unity and multiplicity has not become a "theophanic mirror ' (Rûzbehân), it will remain in the world of opposites. 'This is why the pious monotheist believer, as well as the dogmatic and dialectical theologian, are in essence nothing but polytheists who are unaware of it t [176].'

The Sufi finds himself in the same paradoxical situation with regard to the inner meaning of prophecy as the true Shī'ī; hence the idea of their common origin, which is that of their *walāyat*, that is to say, the esoteric meaning of prophecy. Shi'ism is the inner meaning of Islam and, on the other hand, the Sufi aspires to the esotericism of the *Shari'ah*; one might conclude that they both seek the same result: the same mystical individuation, which is at once annihilation (*fanâ'*) and subsistence in God (*bagâ'*). But, argues Haydar Amolî, any Shia who confines himself to exotericism mutilates the teachings of the Imams and misses the inner realities; and any Sufi relying on the *tarîqat* proves to be a 'true Shia'; but he is a Shia who has forgotten his origins, for he has set aside the theophanic aspect of the Imams.

"Sayyed Haydar," said Corbin, "wants to put an end to this situation once and for all, by sending both the Shia who rail against Sufism and the Sufis who rail against Shia Islam packing. He must contend on several fronts: against legalistic Sunni Islam, against Shi'ites who have forgotten the esoteric, and against Sufis who have forgotten their origins and what they essentially owe to Shi'ism[177] . "Haydar Amolî himself takes on the threefold struggle of Shi'ism. The Shi'ites, sticking solely to the *Shari'ah*, forget the esoteric meaning of the Imams' teachings, and the Sufis, forgetting the origin of their consecration (the *walâyat*), leave the inner religion suspended in a void. Both groups commit the same error by ignoring the initiatory aspect of the Imams' teachings. The true believer is therefore the one who, by embracing the cause and the complete teachings of the holy Imams, encompasses the whole: *Shari'ah*, *Tariqah* and *Haqiqah*[178] . Compared to the Shī'ī reduced to the *Shari'ah* alone, the Sufi is the true Shī'ī; but compared to the Sufi who has forgotten his origins, the complete Shī'ī (embodying all three aspects) is the true Sufi. Haydar Amolī's entire endeavour is aimed at convincing both groups that they cannot do without one another. However, Sufism, by passing over in silence the source of *walâyat*—that is, the source of all esotericism—has become distorted. 'It is as though,' says Corbin, 'Sufism had transferred the content of Imamology onto the person of the Prophet alone, eliminating everything that did not accord with Sunni sentiment. The Sufi idea of the mystical pole, the *Qutb*, is none other than that of the Imam; likewise, in Shi'ite Sufism, the Imam remains the *pole of poles* as the seal of *walâyat*, whilst in Sunni Sufism the idea of *the Qutb* merely substitutes for that of the Imam professed by Shi'ism e[179] . ' Thus, the figure of *the Shaykh*, having usurped in Sufism the role of the spiritual guide who is the hidden Imam—'invisible to the senses but present in the heart[180]'—it can be said that Sunni Sufism succeeds in establishing an 'Imamology without an Imam'.

The elimination of Imamology has another serious consequence. By upsetting the balance between the exoteric and the esoteric, between the study of prophethood and Imamology, one transfers to the person of the Prophet the charisms that properly belong to the Imams, and in so doing, renders authentic esoteric unity impossible. By eliminating Imamology, one thereby destroys the meaning of theophanies. The Shia, by opening oneself to the Face of God (the Imam), preserves the meaning of theophanies; one enters the *tariqat*

without needing to join a Sufi order. He will thus appear in every respect to be a Sufi without being the disciple of any particular *shaykh*. Sufism borrows the concept of *walâyat* from Shi'ism, albeit with some modifications. Haydar Amolî, despite the boundless admiration he shows for Ibn 'Arabî, directs vehement criticism at him for having made Jesus the seal of universal *walâyat*, a seal which, for a Shia, can only be the First Imam. For Haydar Amolî, true reconciliation would consist in avoiding excess, on the part of both the Sufis and the Shia: the Sufi recalling the profound meaning of his *walâyat*, which is the very source of gnosis, and the Shia avoiding the excess of *the zâhir*, of exotericism, which makes him a Shia in the metaphorical sense of the term.

'In fact,' concludes Corbin, 'Shi'ite spirituality extends beyond Sufism. Admittedly, there are Shi'ite Sufi orders; the genealogical tree of most *tarîqat* or orders traces back to one of the Imams. But the Shia esotericist is already, as such, on the Path (the *tarîqat*), without even having to join a Sufi congregation. At the summit of a mystical Sinai, the knowledge of the Imam as his personal guide leads him to self-knowledge[181]."

CHAPTER V
Imamology

The Arabic word *Imâm* means ‘he who stands at the forefront’. It therefore refers to the spiritual guide. The term encompasses the group of the ‘Twelve’, that is to say, the eleven Imâms descended from the Prophet through his daughter Fâtima (*al-Zayra*, the Radiant) and his cousin, the first of the Twelve, ’Alî Ibn Abî Tâlib. Twelver Shi’ism is sometimes also referred to as ‘Imamism’. The Imam is the bearer of the *haqîqat* (spiritual Truth) which upholds both the law and the hermeneutics of the Qur’an. For the Imams hold the key to the Book; they preserve the meaning of the Book in the absence of the Prophet, hence the proclamation of the V[e] Imam: ‘If the Imam were to be removed from the Earth for a single hour, it would tremble in waves that would roll over its inhabitants, just as the sea rolls over in its waves the beings that inhabit it t[182] .’

Whilst, on the Shia side, the Imam is the linchpin around which the cohesion and coherence of existence revolve—the figure whose initiatory role opens up an eschatological perspective—on the Sunni side, by contrast, the Imam remains the linchpin of the social order without assuming any hermeneutical or metaphysical role. ‘His necessity stems solely from the consideration of temporal matters; he is not a sacred concept (implying a sacralisation of the universe) but a secular and laic e[183] . ’ He is not immaculate and pure (’*ismat*); his selection depends on consensus; he is elected, whereas the Imam in the Shia sense, being a sacred person (we mean the Twelve Imams and not their representatives), is beyond any election. He symbolises the essential reality of man, his spiritual *Alter Ego*, hence the saying: ‘He who dies without knowing his Imam (that is to say, without knowing his Self) dies the death of the unconscious s[184].’

The Qur’an alone cannot be the Proof (*Hujjat*), the witness, as long as there is no Preserver, no exegete (*mufassir*) who possesses its complete gnosis. That Preserver is the Imam, the Guide e [185]. For whilst the legacy bestowed upon the prophets by virtue of the legislative function with which they were invested was that of bringing down (*tanzîl*) the Revelation in the form of a Book, that of the Imams was, by contrast, to trace (*ta’wîl*) the letter of this revelation back to its source. This is why the entire cycle of *walâyat*, symbolised by the succession of the twelve Imams, is oriented towards the Return to the Origin (see diagram 2 *above*).

The Imams are endowed with *nass* (express designation by the preceding Imam), purity, and infallibility (’*ismat*). Hence the term ‘The Fourteen Infallibles’ (*shahârdah ma’sûm* – Persian) to refer to the Prophet, his daughter Fâtima, and the Twelve Imams. The idea of infallibility is linked to the Imams’ hierophanic function as the ‘pole of the world’ or ‘pole of poles’, without which earthly existence could not continue for a single moment longer. Yet the pole may be sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, hidden in between. Such is the current state of affairs, since we are currently in a period of occultation.

Shi’ism has interpreted the famous Qur’anic verse concerning the trust[186] in the sense of *walâyat*. It is this trust that makes the Imams the ‘Friends of God’, the ‘guardians of the divine cause’ (*al-amr al-ilâhî*), invested with a mission that complements prophecy. In place of the Sunni double *shahâdat*, Shi’ism substitutes the triple *shahâdat*[187] : to the unity of the One (*tawhîd*) and the exoteric mission of the prophets (*nobowwat*) is added the initiatory and esoteric mission of the Friends of God (*walâyat*), guiding humanity towards the eschatological perspective of the Parousia. The first Imam was, according to the Shia,

to the Prophet of Islam as the Soul is to the seat of intelligence. Thus the Prophet designated the first Imam as ‘his own soul’, his ‘Self’.

The Imam is the face of God and the face of humanity; he is a theophanic manifestation (*mazhar*) because the

‘theophany is, as such, the establishment of a relationship between the one who reveals himself (*motajallâ*) and the one to whom he reveals himself (*motajallâ laho*); the one who reveals himself necessarily does so in a form proportionate to and corresponding with the one to whom he reveals himself e[188] ’. By upholding theophany, the Imam makes Love possible, since it is Love that enables inner vision, the vision of the heart. Thus, not only does the Imam make possible the love inherent in every encounter between the lover and the Beloved, but he also establishes ontological *tawhid*. For divinity *in itself* is neither visible nor knowable: one can only admire the divinity revealed in epiphanic forms.

Qâzî Sa’îd Qommî elaborates at length on the idea of the ‘Face of God’ in his commentaries on Ibn Bâbûyeh’s *Kitâb al-Tawhîb*. The Imam is simultaneously the Face that God shows to man and the face that man shows to God: ‘As for the fact,’ says the Shaykh, ‘that the light of the Imam’s Face almost blinded the eyes of his companions, it is because the Imam is the Face of God (*Wajh Allâh*, the theophany), and that the Imam is wholly turned towards God, and that there is no covering composed of the Elements within him that would prevent one from beholding his being at the level of pure Light[189] . “The Shia believer is, in relation to the Imam, in the same position as the philosopher is in relation to the Active Intellect, or ‘the Valentinian gnostic encountering his personal Angel ’[190]. For the Shia, the Imam embodies the Angel-person, the Inner Guide, the Celestial Self. By elaborating the theophanic form of the Imam as the Face of God and the face of man, all divine-human polarity disappears, and it follows that ‘the Face through which man knows his God is eo ipso the Face through which God knows m e [191]’.

It follows that the Imam, as a celestial theophanic figure, is beyond the laws of causality

historical, and that it also symbolises the principle of the Self or mystical individuation. In fact, the entire history or hagiography of the[Twelfth]Imam, for example, unfolds in a parallel, intermediate world that remains ‘between the worlds’, just as his time is situated ‘between the Times’. Theophany presupposes the autonomy of an *imaginal* world where the vision of the Face of God transmutes all things into symbols. This is the world of the ‘intermediate East’ which, in the hagiography of the[Twelfth]Imam, appears as *the Green Is e*[192]surrounded by a white sea situated in a ‘Non-Where’, the pole of all orientation.

‘He who knows himself knows his Lord’; ‘He who has contemplated his own soul (his

“one’s self) has contemplated his Lord, that is to say, his Imam”; and finally, “He who dies without having known his Imam dies the death of the heedless”[193]. Shia spirituality professes, in this experience of the Self—in which the Imam is the active agent—access to the awareness of a personal relationship, wherein God reveals Himself in singularibus to the one who worships Him. Hence the importance of visions and dreams in which the Imam reveals himself to his followers as their most intimate secret, the Soul of their soul. All accounts reveal that these visions take place, not in a geographically identifiable location, but in another world that suddenly bursts into the sensible order, disrupting familiar coordinates and causing a shift in plane of which the follower is often unaware, as for example in the account of the Green Island where the pilgrim undertakes a mysterious journey into the imaginal world. Just as the Angels bring the dormant spirituality of creators to fruition through the Gnostic illumination of Individuation, so too do the Imams—who are, so to speak, their eschatological counterparts—act upon the virtual angelic nature of beings ‘bringing them out of the state of animality to lead them to the actualised angelic state that makes them beings of paradise (*ahl al-jinnat*)[194] ’. And just as in

In the *cosmological* order, God's knowledge of this world is a 'science' mediated by His Angels, who are the 'Witnesses' of His creation; similarly, in the *eschatological* order, God's knowledge of His believers is mediated by the knowledge of the prophets and the Imams, who now stand as Witnesses before God on behalf of mankind at the Resurrection. A homology is thus established between angelology and Imamology. Whilst at the level of the Origin (*Mabda'*), angelology assumes a cosmological function of creation and descent, at the level of the Return (*Ma'âd*), on the other hand, it is Imamology that will assume the opposite function of eschatology, yet a function that is also soteriological, for knowledge of the Imam, equated with knowledge of the Self, grants us access to salvific gnosis and thereby saves us.

This is why, as God's Witness for humankind on the path of Return, the Imam is the eye through which God beholds His creation. The Imams are both the eyes through which God beholds us and the eyes through which we behold the Attributes of God, given that the Essence is inaccessible and we know of God only His theophanic reflections.

It follows from all this that the Imam is the radiant, true image of the Perfect Man, or, as Corbin puts it, *the Celestial Anthropos*, 'a theme through which Shi'ite Imamology attests to its connection with the theological motifs of *the* Celestial *Anthropos*, familiar to all the gnostic traditions that preceded it'. The Imam is therefore the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Contemplator and the Contemplated. These pairs of terms highlight the eschatological aspects of the Imam, just as they emphasise his eternal pre-existence as the Muhammadian Logos. If the genesis of the universe is a movement that establishes the universe (*Mabda'*), the reverse movement is a point of Return (*Ma'âd*) to the Origin. These two movements of Descent and Return correspond respectively to *tanzîl* and *ta'wîl* (the descent of Revelation and the return of the Letter to its Word), *sharî'at* and *haqîqat* (religious Law and spiritual truth), *nobowwat* and *walâyat* or *imâmat* (prophetic mission and the cycle of Initiation)[(195)] . Consequently, all the functions of the Imams are 'situated' on the Arc of Ascension. At the level of prophecy, the Imam represents the ascending, esoteric meaning of prophecy, that is to say, the third Testimony (*shahâdat*)[196] without which the second Testimony of Islam, the prophetic message, would be ineffective and null and void. At the level of the letter, the Imam is *the hermeneutist* par excellence, since he leads the Book back to its eternal Archetype; and in terms of the Law (*sharî'at*), he is its supreme Truth, since his spiritual teaching leads to the blossoming of man's virtual angelic nature and culminates in the mystical Individuation of Self-knowledge. For without these mediators (Imams), not only would there be no salvation for anyone, but even 'the Qur'anic Revelation would long since have been nothing more than a museum of theological curiosities, just as it in fact is in the eyes of an agnostic e[197] '.

CHAPTER VI
The Twelve Imams, the formative structure of the temple of prophecy

The number of the great prophet-messengers corresponds to that of the planetary spheres. And just as the stages of the planets' revolutions are reflected in the configuration of the twelve signs of the zodiac, so too are the seven periods of prophecy marked respectively by the succession of the twelve spiritual heirs (*awsîya*) or Imâms. Furthermore, before his death, each *Nabî* (prophet-messenger) appoints a spiritual successor, who takes his place specifically to assume the office not of prophecy but of the Imâmat. Thus Seth was appointed by his father Adam, Shem by his father Noah, Ishmael by Abraham, Joshua by Moses, Simon Peter (Shâ'mûn al-Safâ) by Jesus. According to the Shî'ites, Muhammad appointed his cousin 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib. But just as all the earlier prophets were betrayed in a sense 'systematically' by their own people, so too the Prophet of Islam reminded his followers that his people would betray the pact of loyalty to the one he had appointed as his spiritual heir, that is to say, the first Imam. It is the idea of this betrayal that has dominated the consciousness of the Shia. "This," says Corbi n [198], "is a poignant image dominating the Shia consciousness, the way in which it explains the great defection committed by the Sunni majority with regard to what constitutes for it the essence of Islam as a spiritual religion, namely Imamism e [199]."

The number twelve is symbolic and can be found in the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve leaders the tribes of Israel, the twelve springs that gushed forth from the rock struck by Moses' staff, the twelve months of the year, and so on. A perfect correspondence is established between the visible order and the spiritual cosmos. The visible world is governed by the seven celestial bodies, the seven heavens, and the twelve zodiacal constellations, whilst the cosmic order is determined by the seven pole-prophets (*aqtâb*) and the twelve Imams who followed each prophetic cycle respectively. Each of the prophets was a manifestation of the same prophetic reality, which ultimately found its full fulfilment in the 'Seal of the Prophets', just as all the Imams were manifestations of the same imamatic reality. It was with this in mind that the Prophet of Islam, speaking of his spiritual heir, the first Imam, is said to have remarked, according to the Shī'ites: "'Alî was sent secretly with every prophet; with me he was sent publicly t[200]." Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî, starting from the dodecadic structure of the Imâmat, succeeds in projecting the structure of the cubic temple of the Ka'ba—transfigured into a spiritual temple—into a grand cosmological vision. Qâzî Sa'îd shows how, for example (we are simplifying to the extreme), the twelve Imams typify the twelve functional relationships necessary to the structure of the cubic form, which is that of the 'Throne stabilised upon the Primordial Water' (Intelligence as Light surrounding its own objects of knowledge). The relationship of Intelligence-Light, as centre and periphery surrounding its intelligibles, is the meaning of the 'Throne resting upon the water'. And this relationship is stabilised by the eight edges of the cube, which are the twelve functional relationships determining the cubic form at the level of Intelligence, *the imaginal*, and the sensible level of the earthly temple of the Ka'ba. For the Archetype of the Temple, passing (by virtue of the principle of transposition) from one stage of the universe to another, nonetheless retains its identical functional form, just as a melody retains its identical and recognisable structure when one transposes it into different keys[201].

Yet what spatialises and stabilises this overall structure is precisely these twelve functional relationships, which, at the cosmological level of Muhammadian Reality (Intelligence-Spirit), are equated with the twelve creatures of Light, the twelve Imams. Twelver Shia Imāmology becomes the Form, the *configurative power* of a whole organising both the invisible world and the visible universe, and this at all levels where this same *Gestalt* presents itself in different registers. And just as, on the other hand, the form of the Ka'ba Temple is a reflection of the Cosmic Throne, the pilgrimage performed around the Temple of God would have, for the pilgrim, a configurative effect on the formation of his body of light, that is to say, on 'the attainment of his total form, such that his body of light is simultaneously the centre and the outline of his essential, total being(202) ".

And just as the intelligibles revolve around the Intelligence, the 'angels drawn close' around the *malakût*, so too do the pilgrims, performing the rites of circumambulation, integrate themselves into the dynamic centre of the Ka'ba. The same pilgrimage of initiation and reintegration is repeated at every level of being.

1) The Twelfth Imam and the Interregnum of the Occultation

According to Shia traditions, the Prophet of Islam is reported to have said: 'There will be twelve Imams after me; the first is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; the twelfth is the Resurrector (*al-Qâ'im, al-Mahdî* – literally 'the *Guided* One', who is thereby also *al-Hâdî*, 'the Guide'), through whom God will cause the East and West of the Earth to be conquered[203] ." Addressing his spiritual heir, 'Alî, the Prophet is said to have declared: "O 'Alî! The guided and guiding Imams, your descendants, the Most Pure, will number twelve (…). You are the first; the name of the last shall be my own name (Muhammad); when he appears, he shall fill the earth with justice and harmony, just as it is now filled with iniquity and violence[204] ."

For the Shia consciousness, the Twelfth Imam is thus the esoteric fulfilment of the prophetic mission of the Prophet of Islam. Hence the messianic significance of certain *hadiths* attributed to the Prophet in which he declares, for example: "If there were but a single day left in this world, God would prolong that day to raise up a man from my descendants whose name shall be my name and whose title shall be my title; he shall fill the Earth with peace and justice, just as it is today filled with violence and tyranny[205] ."

A halo of supernatural tales, so to speak, surrounds the mysterious figure of this last Imam: they bring to mind the birth of the Buddha, born in a supernatural manner, that of Christ, and the Immaculate Conception. Furthermore, in the accounts relating to the miraculous birth of the Last Imam, there is a clear effort to unite Christianity and Islam in Heaven. For is not Islam, particularly in its Shia form, ultimately the culmination of the entire cycle of Revelations that began with Adam? And is not the last Imam also the Saviour who, at the end of our *Aeon*, will lead all the letters of Revelation back to their original source?'s accounts [206] tell us that the future mother of the twelfth Imam is a Byzantine princess, and therefore Christian, Princess Narkès (*Narcissus*), whose mother is a descendant of Christ's apostles. Her lineage goes back to Sha'mûn (Simon Peter), the spiritual heir of the Lord Christ.

According to Corbin, the marriage of Christianity and Islam represents the transition from the pleroma of the Twelve of the Christian period to the pleroma of the Twelve of the Muhammadian period, and this transition is brought to a close precisely through the mediation of the mother of the TwelfthImam. Through her, the initiation of Christianity into Islam—or rather into Islamic gnosis—is thus accomplished[207].

Let us first note that the idea of the saviour concealing himself in an invisible world inaccessible to

The concept of the sensible world is deeply rooted in Iran's religious consciousness: even a pupil of Mîr Dâmâd, Qotboddîn Ashkevârî, had recognised in the figure of the future eschatological Zoroaster, the Saoshyant, the one whom the Shia refer to as the awaited Imam. "This testimony," Corbin notes, "offers the historian of religious philosophy a glimpse of a grand cycle in which the thought of Shi'ite Iran curves back towards that of ancient Iran, as if under the influence of an inner norm that would keep Iranian thought oriented, by vocation and from the very beginning, towards an eschatological metaphysics[208]."

Another late Iranian thinker, Ja'far Kashfî (d. 1850–1851), in his principal work written in Persian, creates an entire cosmology and an Imami metaphysics centred on the opposition between Light and Darkness, he also establishes a philosophy of history that follows the three essential periods of Mazdeism, namely creation (*khalq* = *bundahisn*), mixture (*khalt* = *gumecisn*), and separation (*farq* = *vicarisn*). Ultimately, the parousia of the[Twelfth]Imam bears a strong resemblance to that of the eschatological heroes of Zoroastrianism: to separate Light from Darkness and restore the world to its original purity of light.

'Although neither the name of Saoshyant nor that of the Paraclete is explicitly mentioned here, the [Twelfth]Imam assumes the role of both. At the same time, we find ourselves faced with an interpretation of dualism that overcomes it without owing anything to Zervanism or Neo-Zervanism, as is the case with the Gayâmartians in Ismaili Gnosticism[209]."

That Iranian thought should have felt so at home in the messianic climate of Shi'ism is, as we have just seen, no surprise. The entire twelve-millennium cycle of Zoroastrian cosmology, culminating in the final transfiguration of the world, and the whole eschatological orientation of the future Iranian saviour, had already predisposed it to this. Undoubtedly the forms had changed, undoubtedly the religious framework had shifted towards the prophetic cycle of the Abrahamic religions, but the profound message of a transfiguration of the world, experienced intensely by the Iranian consciousness – so deeply rooted in the idea of man's exile in this world – remained intact.

The Imam, like Saoshyant, like the ecstatic Iranian hero Kay Khosraw, has indeed been taken from this world, but he is present somewhere else. The Saoshyant who will bring salvation to all of manifested creation is invisible. He springs from the seed of Zoroaster, preserved in the waters of Lake Kansaoya and guarded by a legion of Fravartis (Angels), until a young girl named Eredat-fedhri plunges into the waters of the lake and is fertilised by them s[210] . The Imam is 'hidden from the senses, but present in the hearts of his followers'; since he is the 'pole of the pole', nothing would endure without his presence. A first consequence is that the Imam lives in a mysterious place that scarcely fits into the usual categories we have of space. This place, situated in a 'Non-Where', whilst being outside our space, nevertheless projects its own space; one might also say that the Imam *spatialises* the time of the Occultation into a sort of Earth, or a supraterrestrial place. If people do not see him, it is because they have veiled him from themselves, for human consciousness has become incapable of penetrating his mode of being, of unveiling the *imaginal* space where he resides. The time we are currently living in is the time of the Occultation (*ghaybat*); and the awaited Imam, who is its pole, has moreover been identified by many Shia authors, including Haydar Amoli, with the Paraclete t[211] announced by Jesus in the Gospel of John. Consequently, the parousia is not an external event that will one day impose itself from without, but an event that would internally reveal the space and place of the awaited Imam, and enable us to see him. For the eschatological time, inaugurated after the Seal of Prophecy, will only be consummated at the end of the parousia of the last Imam, who will lift the veils of secrecy and grant us access to the dazzling visibility of the Presence. Just as the gnostic individuation of man raises him, through the arc of ascension, to the level of consciousness of the Divine, so too the parousia of the last Imam,

By bringing the cycle of concealment to a close, it leads humanity back to the source of being.

Thus a homology is established between the individual cycle of salvation and the collective cycle of liberation that encompasses all of humanity. This is due to the axiom that governs the thought of all Shī'ī theosophers: 'Nothing ascends to Heaven except that which descends from it u[212] . " The *prehistory* of the descent coincides with the *post-history* of the ascent, for when the final point of the ascent meets the initial point of the descent, the cycle of being is completed. In contrast to the evolutionary thinking of prevailing ideologies, the *hierohistory* situated between the *prehistory* and *post-history* of Being is a cyclical history. " This hierohistory is oriented vertically in the Gothic style e[213] . » It is not the history of indefinite progress in time, but the *reversal* of the times of horizons into the times of the soul; it is therefore the history of a *conversion*, of a passage to another level of Being, a passage that can only take place through a *rupture* of level. This rupture takes place for all humanity through the Parousia; but, until then, we live in the time of waiting, which is *the 'between-times'*, the existential time of concealment.

But by remaining *in the space between times*, the Imam keeps open the horizon of a real *space* between two worlds, the reality of which makes us realise that something more real than this world is there awaiting us, without which none of this would make sense. For it is in that time and in that space that the Spirit lives, since it is essentially the Time of the Soul; the existential time of our Presence, where Tradition is renewed, constantly re-actualising itself within each of us as an inexhaustible source of inspiration and not as the 'funeral procession' of received opinions, or the casuistry of the shopkeepers of religion. To live thus in the existential time of waiting is also to experience, in all its depth, exile in this world and the longing for the Return.

2) Spiritual chivalry

Finally, let us also say a few words about the idea of 'spiritual chivalry' associated with the very concept of the[Twelfth]Imam. The idea of chivalry (*fotowwat*), known in Persian as *javânmardî*, signifies youth and youthful vigour. The *fatâ* or *javânmard* is first and foremost a 'young man', but in its esoteric sense it refers to spiritual youthfulness, to a sort of second birth that comes with initiation. The work of Shihâboddîn 'Omar Sohrawardî (born in 1145, died in Baghdad in 1235, not to be confused with the other Sohrawardî, *Shaykh al-Ishrâq*) gives us a clear insight into the relationship between this concept and Sufism and social reality. *Fotowwat* has its roots in Sufism, but the movement then sought to sanctify all trades, transmitting their secrets through religious ceremonies. In this way, it is akin to the idea of guild membership as found in medieval Western trade guilds. One enters the *fotowwat* through an initiation ritual comprising three modes of commitment: by word, by the reception of the sword, and by participation in the ritual cup[214]. The activity of the companions, bound by an act of brotherhood, thus becomes a service of chivalry, so that every companion is a *javânmard*. When, for example, the pilgrim (*salik*) or *homo viator* frees himself, during his inner pilgrimage, from carnal bonds, he arrives at the station of the heart, that is to say, the abode of youth. Henceforth, the Persian word *javânmard* or *fatâ* in Arabic denotes one in whom spiritual energies are realised, and it is with this ethic of purity that *fotowwat* extends to trade guilds and permeates all professional activities with a sense of 'chivalrous service', complete with its rites of initiation, its ranks, its secrets and its pact of loyalty215 . As for the pact of loyalty, it amounts to remaining faithful to the fundamental nature of man, *fitrat*, revealed in the question God addressed to him in pre-eternity: 'Am I not your Lord?' (7:171). For this original nature determines the entire anthropology of the spiritual man, just as it

guides the direction of his quest, the culmination of which is his Return to his own people, to the world to which he belongs.

Books on *fotowwat* span the centuries and all bear the mark of Sufism. Whilst *fotowwat* marks the penetration of the idea of spiritual chivalry into Islam, it is simultaneously aware, 'by virtue of its origins, of being a branch derived from Sufism'. It is precisely for this reason that it was able to permeate different walks of life and professions, offering each a form of *fotowwat* suited to them. It truly represented the pinnacle of the spiritual ideal offered to Islamic society".

The concept of *fotowwat* would later be incorporated into the Shia concept of *walâyat*. By this is meant the covenant of divine friendship, the covenant of the 'Friends of God' (*dûstân-e Haqq*), which governs, within the framework of chivalric service, the relationship between God and humankind e [216].

In conclusion, one might say that the ethics of chivalry is a permanent ethos deep within the soul Iranian tradition since the ancient prophecy of Zoroaster. The Parousia, which will herald the Resurrection, is the exact counterpart, in Shia eschatology, of the concept of *Frashkart*—the transfiguration or rejuvenation of the world—in the Zoroastrian religion. "The Zoroastrian ethics of *the Fravartis* (Mazdean Archangels) and the ethics of *the javânmard*: this is the very essence of the message of 'spiritual chivalry' bequeathed by Ira n [217] . " The Shia knight, just like the Zoroastrian knight, is one who assists the saviour, fighting with him, at his side, to prepare the world's palingenesis, in order to hasten its final transfiguration. And Corbin sums it up: "Of both the Shia and the Zoroastrian ideas, it is true to say that the idea translates into a community of knights of the faith. *The* Iranian *ethos* perpetuates and unites the ancient tradition of the *pahlavân* with the Abrahamic tradition of *fotowwat*. Whether companions of the Saoshyant or companions of the Hidden Imam, both are striving towards the same ultimate goal. 'May we be among those who bring about the Transfiguration of the world,' repeated a liturgical refrain of the Zoroastrian faithful. "May God hasten the joy of his coming," repeats every Shia believer at every mention of the name of the[Twelfth]Imam. The two ejaculatory prayers resonate in unison; they bear witness to the ethic of the knight of the faith, inseparable from the eschatological metaphysics [of the '][218]…"

CHAPTER VII
Ismailism

Henry Corbin took a keen interest in Ismailism and its relationship with Twelver Shi'ism. In his **History of Islamic Philosophy**, Corbin examined the major periods of Ismailism: Proto-Ismailism, Ismailism during the Fatimid era, and the reformed Ismailism of Alamut. This research, however, was preceded by significant publications of Persian and Arabic texts. We know that most Ismaili thinkers, with the exception of Qâzî No'mân (d. 363/974), were of Iranian origin. Hence the undisputed importance of Abû Ya'qûb Sejestânî (10th century), whose Persian text (itself a translation of an Arabic original, which remains untraceable to this day) was published by Corbin under the title *Kashf al-Mahjû b* [219](The Unveiling of Hidden Things), the first volume of the Bibliothèque iranienne. Subsequently appeared the important treatise by Nâsir-e Khosraw entitled *Kitâb-e Jâmi' al-Hikmatain* (The Book Uniting the Two Wisdoms)[(220)] which we shall discuss later, and the Commentary on the Ismaili Qasîda by Abû'l-Haitham Jorjânî, attributed to Mohammad ibn Sorkh of Nishapur (10th–11th centuries), a Persian text n[221] . It was on the basis of this *qasîda*, presented to Nâsir-e Khosraw by the emir of Badakhshân, 'Alî ibn Asad, that Nâsir-e Khosraw composed his treatise on the 'two Wisdoms': that of the ancient philosophers and that of the theosophers of the Ismaili faith. This took place in 460/1070, that is to say, nine years after the Ismaili philosopher had completed his other famous work, the *Zâd al-Mosâfirîn*. In 1961, Corbin published the *Ismaili Trilogy*[222] containing three treatises: the *Kitâb al-Yanâbî'* (The Book of Sources) in Arabic by Sejestânî (Fatimid period); a second treatise in Arabic, the *Risâlat al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'âd* (Treatise on the Origin and the Return), which is the work of a Yemeni dâ'î, Hosayn ibn Mohammad ibn al-Walîd (d. 667/1268). This treatise provides a summary of Ismaili doctrine as professed in Yemen in the 13th century; it represents an Ismailism which, despite the fall of the Fatimids in Cairo, continues to uphold the specifically Fatimid tradition. This tradition refers to the *da'wat qadîm* (the ancient religion) as opposed to the *da'wat jadîd* (the new), which is the reformed Ismailism of Alamut (the proclamation of the Great Resurrection on 8 August 1164, which brought an end to the *sharî'at* by unveiling a pure religion of esotericism). The new *da'wat* also encompasses the Eastern or Iranian Ismailis as opposed to the Western or Egyptian Ismailis. The third treatise of the *Trilogy* is a work in Persian by an anonymous author, presented as a commentary on The *Rose Garden of Mystery* by Mahmûd Shabestarî (d. 720/1320), hence the title of the treatise: *Ta'wîlât-e Golshan-e Râz*. 'This treatise shows us Ismaili gnosis meditating upon and assimilating a Sufi text with an ease that would be inconceivable were there not, from the outset, a set of common intentions[223]. " This text further illustrates the fate of Ismailism in Iran after the fall of Alamut, when it appears clothed in the mantle of Sufism. Corbin was not interested in the history – which is, incidentally, rather convoluted – of Ismailism, unlike M.W. Ivanow, whose historical work in particular sought to bring some order to the events that shaped this doctrine, but rather in the major metaphysical themes. He also published numerous articles (either in the form of lectures at Eranos or elsewhere) which appeared very recently in a collection under the title *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*[224]. An important Ismaili text entitled 'The Book of the Sage and the Disciple' (*Kitâb al-'âlim wa'l-gholâm*) has already appeared in part in one of Corbin's last posthumous books, *L'homme et son Ang e* [225] .

However, we should hasten to point out here that the full text of this work, which displays extraordinary metaphysical audacity, will shortly be published in a separate volu [226].

As we have just seen, Corbin's contribution to the study of Ismailism is enormous. Undoubtedly, a more detailed study of Ismailism as interpreted by Corbin would go far beyond the scope of this study, which remains focused on the entirety of Henry Corbin's spiritual journey within the Iranian-Islamic world, of which Ismailism forms part, just as Shaykhiism does. What seems to have attracted Corbin to Ismaili gnosis – for, to tell the truth, Ismailism remains an eminently gnostic religion – is the theme of *tawhid*, whose manifold connotations were developed to dizzying heights by the theosophical Ismailis. The notion of esoteric Unity stems from an immediate creative Establishment (*Ibdâ'*) which allows for a negative and affirmative theology sheltered from the double trap of *ta'tîl* (abstract monotheism) and *tashbîh* (metaphysical idolatry). This pure esotericism makes Ismailism a 'religion of the Resurrection', pitting, as Nâsir-e Khosraw puts it, the doctors of the Law (*foqahâ-ye dîn-e Islam*) and the spouters of inept proofs against the Esotericists and spiritual hermeneutists of symbols (*Ahl-e Bâtin o ta'wîl*)[(227)] ".

It is not possible for us to explore all these themes in this brief outline. We shall nevertheless attempt, in the following pages, to outline the relationship between Ismailism and Twelver Shi'ism, the major periods of Ismailism, and some of Corbin's favourite themes, such as esoteric *tawhîd*.

1. Both Septimanian Shi'ism (Ismailism) and Twelver Shi'ism have endured centuries of persecution. Ismailism has been known by various names: at times identified with the Qarmatians, at times accused of being the party of the 'heretics ' (*malâhid*), or called 'Septimanian' (*sab'îya*) in reference to the heptadic rhythm that Ishmaelism finds at all levels of Being, of which the succession of the seven Imams is merely the mytho-historical version. There is also the more general designation of *Bâtinîya*, the 'Esotericists'. As for the Ismailis themselves, they have given themselves designations such as *Ahl-e Bâtin*, the People of Esotericism, *Ahl-e Ta'wîl*, the People of Hermeneutics, and *Ahl-e Ta'yîd*, those assisted by divine inspiration[228] . Ismailism thus takes its name from the fact that its extremely complex worldview—regarding cosmology, the millennia of its prophetic tradition, and the succession of the Imams—is structured around the number seven, whereas Twelver Shi'ism bases its entire religious world on the plenitude of the twelve Imams. Both arose within the immediate circle of the Holy Imams, notably the sixth, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765). When this highly charismatic figure passed away, his eldest son, Imam Isma'il, had already died before him. He thus posed this fundamental question: 'Did the investiture of the Imamate fall to his son, or did Imam Ja'far have the right, exercising his prerogative as he did, to transfer the investiture to another of his own sons, Musa al-Kazim, Ismâ'îl's younger brother? In fact, these questions of person are overshadowed by something deeper: the perception of a transcendent structure whose typology is exemplified by the celestial figures of the Imams. This distinction separates the Twelver Shi'ites from the Seven-Imam Shi'ites s[229] ."

But what exactly is this deeper dimension? Corbin believes that the difference between the Seven and the Twelve is not merely a matter of temporal sequence; rather, it concerns two distinct cosmic rhythms which, at the level of esotericism, can find common ground. Whilst Twelver Shi'ism does not possess the same complex system of initiation and *ta'wîl* (such as the seven esoteric grades, corresponding to the seven periods of the cycles), at the very least its entire theosophy is also founded upon initiation. Thus, *ta'wîl*, as an instrument of knowledge and a return to the origin of all Revelation considered as descent (*tanzîl*), makes these two branches of Shia Islam the Islam of

Spiritual, or that of the Intimates and the Initiates. This is therefore the common denominator between the two ×[230], but this does not alter the fact that each is governed by a rhythm of spiritual history: on the one hand, the number twelve (each of the six great prophets had his twelve Imams); on the other hand, the number seven among the Ismailis: the succession of each prophet passes through the seven Imams or several heptads of Imams. This difference in rhythm also reveals an astronomical difference. Corbin believes that the Imamology of the Twelver Shi'ites symbolises the Fixed Heavens, the sky of the twelve zodiacal constellations, whilst that of Septimanian Shi'ism represents the seven planetary heavens and their moving stars. For the Twelvers, the last Imam is *already here*; he has appeared but remains in a hidden state until his final parousia; whereas for the Ismailis, the last Imam is the secret of the future, the Perfect Form that humanity will bring forth on the Last Day, 'which cannot dawn until the entire cycle of planetary revolutions has been completed. But on both sides, the 'time of the Imam' is *spatialised* into a supraterrestrial Earth e[231] … ". Thus, both share essential common features, whilst being very different, and it is impossible to conduct an in-depth theological study of one without taking the other into account. As for the misleading label of 'Assassins' attributed to the Iranian Ismailis, Corbin is categorical: 'And it is no doubt to their theological ignorance that we must attribute the casualness with which, even today, certain irresponsible publicists, acting as unwitting accomplices to Abbasid propaganda, refer to the Ismailis of Alamut in Persia, in the 12th and 13th centuries, as the "Assassins", when in fact this was a dubious pun and one ought to have the good faith to put an end to this defamation of a desperate resistance movement against the Turks and Sunni Islam e[232] ."

Corbin first identifies a proto-Ismailism that spanned from the 8th century until the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in Cairo (296/909) under 'Obaydallah al-Mahdi, who is regarded as having realised on earth the Ismaili hope of the Kingdom of God. Ultimately, Corbin believes, the political triumph marking the advent of the Fatimids in Cairo appears as a paradox; it would also prove so in the proclamation of the Alamut reform. 'To what extent is an esoteric brotherhood compatible with the official organisation of a stat t[233] ? ' Is there not a danger, in the creation of a state, of sacrificing religion to the state? This period is marked intellectually above all by an important book entitled *Omm al-Kitâb* (The Archetype of the Book), preserved in archaic Persian. The book takes the form of a conversation between the5thImam, Mohammad Bâqir (d. 115/733) and three of his disciples known as the *roshanîyân*, that is to say, 'beings of Light'. "From the outset," says Corbin, "it contains a very clear echo of the Infancy Gospels (already suggesting how Imâmology would be the counterpart of a Gnostic Christology). Other dominant motifs include: the mystical science of letters (*jafr*), already particularly favoured in the school of Mark the Gnostic; groups of five, the *pentadism* that dominates a cosmology in which very clear traces of Manichaeism can be found, and from which the analysis reveals a *kathenotheism* of extreme interest t[234] . ' Another dominant theme is the 'seven battles of Salmân' against Antagonism. Salmân the Persian appears here as a primordial theophany of *the* celestial *Anthropos*. He reveals the theophany which, for Ismailism, is the very secret of esoteric Unity. For without this *theophany*—which is the mediation of the Anthropos-Imam-Salmân—monotheism, by negating itself, degenerates into 'metaphysical idolatry'. We shall soon see the essential function that this esoteric *unity* assumes in the gnosis of a Sejestânî.

At the end of this dark period and up until the founding of the Fatimid dynasty, we see
the emergence of major systematic works, already possessing a perfect technique and a sophisticated philosophical vocabulary. 'Even more clearly than among the Twelver Shi'ites,' writes Corbin, 'the great names among these masters of Ismaili thought, apart from Qâdî No'mân (d. 363/974), are names

Iranian s[235] »: Abû Hâtim Râzî (d. 322/933), the physician-philosopher Zakarîyâ Râzî (Rhazès), Abû Ya'qûb Sejestânî, a profound thinker and author of some twenty works; Ahmad ibn Ibrahim Nishapurī (5th/11th century), Hamidoddin Kermānī (d. 408/1017), a prolific author who wrote several treatises on the controversy with the Druze, the 'separated brethren' of Ismailism e[236] , Mo'ayyad Shîrâzî (d. 470/1077), a prolific author in Arabic and Persian, and the famous Nâsir-e Khosraw (d. c. 470/1077), whose works are all in Persian.

The death of the Fatimid caliph al-Montansir bi'llâh (487/1094) led to the dethronement of Prince Nizâr, the legitimate heir to the Imamate, in favour of Prince al-Mosta'lî, and split the Fatimid Ismaili community into two branches: the so-called Western branch (the *Mosta'liyân*), which continued to follow the ancient Fatimid tradition. Their history also includes a Yemeni period, following the assassination of the last titular Fatimid Imam (al-Amir 524/1130), when the centre of the *da'wat* was transferred to Yemen; followed by an Indian period, when, at the end of the 16th century, the headquarters of the community's leader (*dâ'î al-Motlaq*) was transferred to India. The Ismailis of the Indian branch are known as the *Bohras*. The other branch, known as the Eastern branch, represents the *Nizari* tradition, that of the reformed Ismailism of Alamut, whose main centre was the famous Ismaili stronghold located south-east of the Caspian Sea.

This period in Alamut was marked by the strong personality of Hasan Sabbâh (d. 518/1124), a strange figure distorted by legend and recognised as the leader of the Assassins. His role was to extend the network of Ismaili commanderies throughout Iran and to organise the merciless struggle against the Turkish, Sunni Seljuk dynasty. What characterises this Iranian Ismailism, says Corbin,

'He does not hesitate to tip the balance in favour of the *haqîqat*, or gnostic truth, over the *sharî'at*, or positive religious law, and thereby to acknowledge the precedence of the Imâm over the Prophet. Such was the meaning of the proclamation of the 'Great Resurrection' (*Qiyâmat al-Qiyâmât*) at Alamût, on 8 August 116 4[237] ". This defining event was the initiative taken by Imam Hasan, the Grand Master (*Khodâvand*), who died in 561/1166. What this Proclamation actually implied was nothing less than the advent of a pure spiritual Islam, freed from any spirit of servitude to the Law, a personal religion of the Resurrection, because it thus revealed the true meaning of the prophetic Revelations. After the Mongol catastrophe that brought an end to Alamut (614/1256), Ismailism survived in Persia by donning the mantle of Sufism, which 'frequently gives Iranian Sufism the appearance of crypto-Ismailism[238]'. It is because of these fundamental affinities that the Ismailis regard many Sufi masters, such as Sanâ'î (1151), 'Attâr (1231) and Rûmî (1273), as their own. One sometimes hesitates "to decide whether a text comes from a Sufi steeped in Ismailism or an Ismaili steeped in Sufism e[239]", as is the case with the famous Persian poem by Shabestarî which we have already mentioned, The *Rose Garden of Mystery*. As for the Nizari branch, it continues to exist to this day in the tradition of the followers of the Aga Khan, which itself stems from the Iranian reform of Alamut. In the history following the fall of Alamut, W. Ivanow still discerns a sort of revival in the 16th and 17th centuries; he refers to this as the 'Anjûdân period', named after an important town 20 miles east of Soltânâbâd (now Arâk), which was for a time the residence of the Imams. The descendants of those who took refuge in India are those known there today as the *Khojas*, who recognise as their spiritual leader H.H. the Aga Khan, the 49thImam m[240]. However, the origins of the Ismaili community in India date back to an earlier period, as the Mongol invasions of the 13th century precipitated a flood of Ismaili refugees, and even before the advent of the Fatimids, Ismaili 'missionaries' (*dâ'î*) had established a state in Sind with Moltan as its capital.

Unfortunately, the Persian-language literature of the Eastern Ismailis suffered, as a result of the

fall of Alamut and the terrible persecutions that followed, suffered a complete interruption; many important works were destroyed, and those that survived the catastrophe were preserved in Badakhshan, in Central Asia. As for the literature of the western branch of the Mosta'lîyân, written entirely in Arabic, it was better preserved. 'Undoubtedly Yemen (like Badakhshan) was fortunate not to lie on the major routes along which history passes; this is always a fortunate situation for libraries. Not only were the principal systematic works of the Fatimid period thus preserved—most of them by Iranian authors writing in Arabic—but there was also a whole dynasty of Yemeni philosophers, who are certainly not the least forgotten in our histories of philosophy, and for good reason, given that a disastrous secrecy has rendered them inaccessible s[241] ."

Esoteric *tawhid*

One of the Ismaili themes that preoccupied Corbin is that of *tawhîd*, or the affirmation of the One, which involves avoiding the double trap of *ta'tîl* (agnosticism) and *tashbîh* (the assimilation of the Manifested to His Manifestation). Hence the dialectic of double negativity that Corbin finds in the Persian version of Sejestânî's work entitled *Kashf al-Majhûb* (The Unveiling of Hidden Things). Corbin has translated this text in full into French, but this translation has not yet been published[242] . Thanks to the kind permission of MrCorbin,Iwas able to peruse the text and compare it with the original. Corbin's translation is, as always, precise, elegant and imbued with the intelligence of a man who not only translates a text but masterfully transposes it into another register whilst retaining the nuances and subtleties of the original. Let us now see how Sejestânî conceives of esoteric Unity.

The Principle is the Super-Being; it is the imperative that brings into being (*hast-konandeh*, Persian) as the opposite

to that-which-brings-into-being (*hast-kardeh*) or, in today's language, we would say '*the Being*'. Thus the Ismailis had a very acute understanding of the ontological distinction between Being, the Originator (*Mobdi'*), the Mystery of Mysteries (*ghayb al-ghoyûb*), in short, the One-Who-Brings-To-Be (the KN, *Esto*) and the being as such. Beyond the One, there is the Unifier who unifies all monads. *That-Which-Brings-To-Be* (*hast-konandeh*) can only be described in negative terms. It is excluded from the Creator, from limits, from Attributes, from place, from time. By declaring that God is non-thing, unlimited, unqualified, not in space, not in time, non-being, one attests to the One in his transcendence. Whilst this first negation consists in establishing the transcendence of the One by isolating it from all the characteristics proper to creatures, it is, on the other hand, through the subsequent negation that the mark of a true awareness of the Creator is attained, such that it is free from any claim seeking to abolish Him (*ta'tîl*). Through this second negation, the Creator is no longer merely non-thing, but also 'non-thing and *not* non-thing; He is unlimited and *not* unlimited; He is unqualified and *not* unqualified; He is non-in-a-place and *not* non-in-a-place; He is non-in-a-time and *not* non-in-a-time; he is non-being and non-non-being[243] ".

In this way, Sejestânî concludes, one avoids both assimilation (*tashbîh*) and annihilation (*ta'tîl*). Assimilation is avoided through the first negation, and annihilation through the subsequent negation. 'Thus it is verified that the Creator's transcendence is authentically realised only on condition that we in turn exclude the antithesis of these negations, both that of the first negation—which must preserve us from assimilating Him—and that of the subsequent negation—which must prevent us from destituting Him. Understand[244].'

Thus is the 'theophanic function' founded and defined, since truth lies in simultaneity

of this double negation which, whilst saving us from the twin pitfalls of *ta'tîl* and *tashbîh*, thereby recognises and establishes the *hodûd*, that is to say, the limits and degrees of things. This is why another 12th-century Yemeni scholar also defined *tawhîd* as 'consisting in knowing the celestial and terrestrial *hodûd* (degrees), and in recognising that each of them is unique in its rank and degree, with no other being

é[245] ”.

This ‘theophanic function’, Corbin will find it in all manifestations of Islamic gnosis, in Rûzbehân’s concept of amphiboly (*iltibâs*) (*cf.* Book V), in Ibn ’Arabî’s theophanic Imagination, in the phenomenon of the mirror in Persian art, in Haydar Amolî’s ‘ontological unity’; and he will always insist, tirelessly, that the ‘theophanic function’ is not incarnation, but that it implies a ‘Docetist’ view of things; that it presupposes the *real* existence of an intermediate, *imaginal* world between the Spirit and the body, without which theophany cannot be salvaged for lack of its own ontological *locus*. And it is in this *sense* that we must also interpret that often elusive phenomenon which he refers to as the ‘paradox of monotheism’. The immense merit of Ismaili gnosis lies in having foreseen very early on (as early as the 10th century, Sejestânî, for example) the importance of this phenomenon in contrast to the Necessary Being of the Avicennian philosophers (who only began to philosophise from *being* – the *act of being*) and to have avoided, sometimes at the cost of an excess of esotericism, the catastrophe of *metaphysical idolatry*. For to avoid this catastrophe, ‘is to recognise,’ says Corbin, ‘that the only selfhood of the Principle we can attain is the knowledge that, by the very act of its being, the First Intelligence, the archangel Logos, possesses of the Principle that establishes it. But this knowledge is itself a form of ignorance: the Intelligence knows that it cannot reach the essential core of the Princip e[246] ”. This is, in short, what Nicholas of Cusa referred to as ‘learned ignorance’ (*docta ignorantia*), that is to say, an apophatic theology which necessarily implies the need for an affirmative theology. For, ultimately, only an apophatic theology can serve as an antidote to the corrosive nihilism of our time[247].

It is this militant approach to esotericism that has, throughout history, set the bold Ismaili thinkers at odds with the jurists. One need only refer to the vehement and uncompromising indictment levelled by Nasir-e Khosraw against the *faqihs*; but it was also this tendency that prompted Imam Hasan to proclaim at Alamut on 8 August 1164 the Great Resurrection, which was to abolish the *Sharia*, bring forward the eschatology and establish a pure religion of the Spirit.

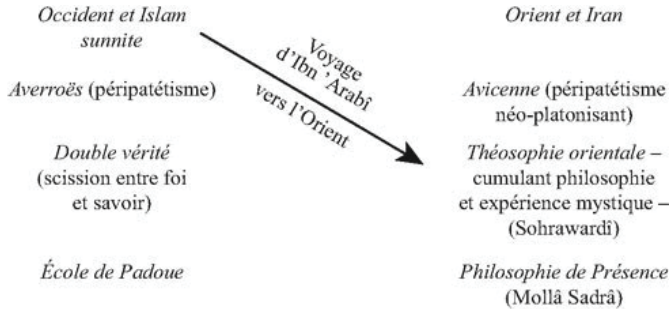
And it is this same metaphysical audacity that made the extraordinary adventure of Ismailism so appealing to Henry Corbin; and although this audacity has attracted its fair share of trouble and misunderstanding over the centuries, it nonetheless remains, as the great Nâsir-e Khosraw so aptly puts it, the stance of the Esotericists and spiritual interpreters of symbols (*Ahl-e bâtin-o ta’wîl*) in the face of the pious nonsense of the doctors of the Law[248] .

BOOK III
On the Metaphysics of Essences to the Theosophy of Presence

CHAPTER I
Averroism and Avicennism

It is a common misconception to believe that Al-Ghazâlî's critique dealt a decisive blow to Islamic philosophy and that, thanks to Averroes, this philosophy reached its zenith and, at the same time, its end. This is Renan's view, according to whom Islamic philosophy was then lost in the sands. In fact, Averroism was to flourish mainly in the West and, via the Masters of Arts at the University of Paris, lead to the theory of double truth characteristic of Latin Averroism; that is to say, to the separation of faith and knowledge, religion and philosophy. Perhaps this was indeed the fate of philosophy in Sunni Islam, since Avicennism, as we shall soon see, was swept away by the tide of Averroism. But the situation was quite different in the Iranian world. Al-Ghazâlî's vehement treatise (The 'Destruction of the Philosophers') against the philosophers, Averroes' restoration of a strictly observant Aristotelianism, and the disappearance of Avicennism left no trace there. The event that took place there and succeeded Avicenna was not the destruction of his Neoplatonism but the establishment of illuminative theosophy (*Hikmat al-Ishrâq*) by Sohrawardî. It was also the 'spiritual ferment' arising from the union of the two schools: that of Sohrawardî's *Ishrâq* and that of Ibn 'Arabî's speculative gnosis. It brought to the fore the question of the relationship between Sufism and Shi'ism and their integration into the philosophy of the Presence in the thought of Mulla Sadra.

In the West, Latin Avicennism failed in the face of attacks by William of Auvergne, followed by the success of Averroism, which gave rise to the School of Padua. In Iran, a new destiny which 'infused Avicennism with the vitality of Sohrawardi's Neoplatonism' and successive revivals that have ensured its continuity to the present day. Philosophy, thereby becoming increasingly mystical, took the opposite path to secularisation: it remained sheltered from the divisions between faith and knowledge, religion and philosophy.


Occident et Islam sunnite
Averroës (péripatétisme)
Double vérité (scission entre foi et savoir)
École de Padoue
Voyage d'Ibn 'Arabî vers l'Orient
Orient et Iran
Avicenne (péripatétisme néo-platonisant)
Théosophie orientale – cumulant philosophie et expérience mystique – (Sohrawardî)
Philosophie de Présence (Mollâ Sadrâ)

Indeed, the great philosopher of Al-Andalus, Ibn Rushd, known in the West from the 13th century onwards by his Hispanicised form Averroes (1126–1198), can be regarded, according to Corbin, as the *symbol of the divide separating the Western and Eastern strands* of Islamic thought.

What was the significance of this Peripatetic philosophy to which Averroes had devoted his life's work?

To understand this, one must consider the differences between him and Avicenna.

Averroes is determined to restore authentic Peripateticism at any cost. This is why he levels the harshest of criticisms at Neoplatonism.

1) He rejects emanation, since, he believes, all emanation is a form of crypto-creationism and the idea of any kind of creation is unacceptable to a Peripatetic. Consequently, Avicenna's principle of *ex uno non fit nisi unum* (from the One can proceed only the One) ceases to apply, and with it the order of causation it implies. Henceforth, the Separate Intellect can be the cause of a celestial soul, not because it conceives that soul, as is the case with Avicenna, but because it is *known* to that soul. Thus, the Intellect is no longer a creative cause, but a final cause. Hence the rejection of any procession of the Intellects and of any notion of emanation.

2) Averroes also takes issue with Avicenna's cosmology and excludes the entire second angelic hierarchy of the Soul-Angels, whose realm corresponds to the active imagination. He criticises Avicenna's angelology for its triadic structure, which places the Celestial Soul between the Separate Intellect and the Celestial Sphere. Averroes thus dismantles the *mundus imaginalis*. From now on, there will be no more 'symphonic encounter' between the philosopher and the prophet in the interworld of the imagination. The world of intelligences will clash with the sensible world, without any mediation enabling them to symbolise one another. 'Since the data of prophetic revelation cannot be rationalised, there remains only the choice between untenable literalism and harmless allegorism. Rational truth and revealed truth, philosophy and theology, will clash in a duel with no resolution, and the divorce between belief and knowledge, as well as the divorce between thought and being, have weighed heavily on centuries of Western thought, whilst the Iranian philosophical tradition—Avicennian and *Ishrâqî*—knew nothing of this [divorce249] ."

One can thus gauge the full extent of the divergence between the West, where the dual truth of[" (250)]from Latin Averroism prevails, and the East, where Avicennism, combined with Sohrawardi's philosophy of *Ishrâq*, continues to thrive. Where the world of celestial angels still persists, there are symbolic realities, stemming from visionary narratives. Where it is sorely lacking, the *novel* emerges. Nor is it a coincidence that the modern novel emerged during the Renaissance as a consequence of the one-sided nature of European sciences, which had excluded from their field of research what Husserl called the 'world of life'.

3) This loss of *the imaginal* will also be followed by the loss of spiritual individuation, and will have a consequence on the Gnostic scope of the active intellect. Indeed, Averroes acknowledges, alongside the separate and unique Active Intellect, a human intellect independent of the body; yet this intellect, far from being the individual, merges with the perishable; that which is eternal in man belongs solely to the unique and separate Active Intellect. The Active Intellect 'is particularised in a soul as light is in a body'. But that light does not properly belong to the body. In relation to the Active Intellect, the human species possesses only a passive intellect. The coming into contact of the Intelligence with the passive intellect produces an intellect that possesses the potentiality of matter (*intellectus materialis*) with regard to form; it is therefore no longer a separate (*mojarrad*), individualised intellect. For Avicenna, on the other hand, the potential intellect is actualised by the Illumination of the Intelligence, which produces knowledge in it just as light produces sight in the eyes. It is through this that man sees. Man's intellect is not passive in relation to it; on the contrary, it is the partner of the Angel.

Thus, with the world of the soul gone and the intellect reduced to the logical concept of a collective, all paths are now open to the secularisation already inherent in the doctrine of double truth.

Things appear quite differently when viewed from the other end of the Islamic world, that is to say from Iran, where Avicennism continues to thrive and evolve into an *Ishrâqî* form of Avicennism, a trend that persists to this day. The radical influence at work there is no longer Al-Ghazâlî's scholarly critique, nor the Cordovan philosopher's dismantling of Neoplatonism, but the speculative gnosis of Ibn 'Arabî and

his school. The task of intellectual endeavour is no longer to sever the link between religion and philosophy, but to ensure that the philosopher is imbued with both philosophical knowledge and mystical experience. It is he alone who deserves the title of ‘God’s vicegerent’, says Sohrawardî.

CHAPTER II
Avicenna or a strongly Neoplatonised Aristotelianism

Avicenna was born in August 980 near Bukhara, in Transoxiana, that is to say at the eastern edge of the Iranian world, which is referred to as 'Outer Iran'. He stands at the crossroads of Eastern and Western thought: the Western perspective, as his work was known through medieval Latin scholasticism, and the Eastern perspective, namely that of Iranian Islam, where the Avicennian tradition has never ceased to live on and transform itself to this day. In the 10th century, thought was flourishing in the Islamic world; Avicenna's era coincided with major events[251].

From the mid-12th century onwards, the thought of Avicenna, along with that of al-Kindî, al-Fârâbî and al-Ghazâlî, found its way into the Christian West through translations. This was followed by translations of the works of Averroes. Translations of Avicenna's works were largely confined to a single fundamental treatise, the compendium entitled the *Shifâ* (*Book of Healing of the Soul*), which comprises Logic, Physics and Metaphysics. It was the impact of these fragmentary translations that gave rise to the phenomenon known as 'Latin Avicennism', although strictly speaking there were no Christian thinkers who were Avicennists through and through in the same way that there were, for example, unconditional Averroists. Avicennian doctrine, by virtue of its Neoplatonic hue, was able to accommodate itself to certain already known forms of Platonism, such as that of Saint Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, or John Scotus Eriugena. The break between Avicenna and Christianity occurred 'at the point where Avicennian doctrine merges with his angelology and, consequently, his cosmology'. It was the direct connection of the individual to the celestial pleroma, without the mediation of a *magister*, that provoked the 'fear of the Angel' in the West. And this fear cast a total shadow over the symbolic meaning of Avicenna's initiatory and visionary narratives. On the whole, Avicennian angelology, in contrast to Averroism, guaranteed the autonomy of an intermediate world of pure imagination; it made possible the conjunction of the Angel of Revelation and the Active Intellect upon which spiritual exegesis, the *ta'wîl*, depended; and above all, it ensured the autonomy of the individual and their individuation through the illumination of the Angel-Active Intellect. All this was far from reassuring to Christian thinkers; which is why there were never any Christian thinkers who strictly adhered to Avicenna's teachings.

1) The metaphysics of essences

Avicenna's metaphysics is a metaphysics of essences, and this remained the dominant school of thought within the Iranian tradition of Avicennism until Mulla Sadra Shirazi replaced it with a metaphysics of existence and Presence. He thus gave precedence to the act of being over essence. The essence, or nature, or quiddity of a thing is neutral both in relation to the negative condition that prevents it from being a general idea and in relation to the positive condition that actualises it in an individual. Existence, being, is then something, an accident superimposed upon essence, but a necessary accident. Henceforth, the notion of being splits into necessary and possible being. Possible is that which is, but which would never exist were it not for a cause rendering it

necessary. *The Necessary Being* creates the world through emanation or through the very act of divine thought; and this knowledge that the Divine Being has eternally of Itself is nothing less than the First Emanation, the First Intelligence, *al-'aql al-awwal*. Creation therefore has as its cause, in the philosophy of *the Mashshâ'ûn* (Peripatetics), the polarisation of being into necessary and possible being, and God's intellecting of Himself, that is to say, the very 'act of divine thought thinking itself'.

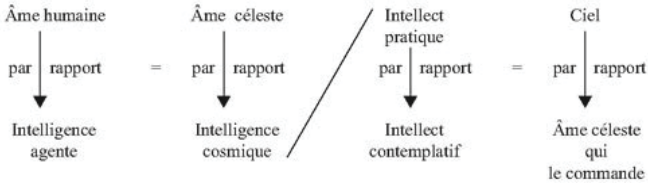
Avicenna's cosmology thus presents itself as a 'phenomenology of angelic consciousness '[252]. His theory of knowledge is inseparable from his metaphysics. The procession of the Cherubic Intelligences is an *angelology* that underpins both cosmology and gnoseology, upon which Avicenna's anthropology also depends.

a) Cosmology (procession of the Intelligences)

The procession of the ten Intelligences unfolds in a ternary rhythm. The First Intelligence, emanating from the Necessary Being, has a threefold contemplation n[253]. From this contemplation emanate, respectively, the Second Intelligence, the Soul of the First Heaven, and the etheric body of that First Heaven. This Heaven is set in motion by the desire that draws it towards the Archangel from whom it emanates and of whom it is also the Thought. These triple acts of contemplation are repeated in each of the Intelligences, giving rise, each time, to the triad of a new Intelligence, a new Soul and a new Heaven, up to the tenth Intelligence – which is the active Intelligence. Thus is completed the double higher hierarchy of the ten Intelligences, those which Avicenna calls the cherubim (*karûbîyûn*) or Most Holy Angels (*malâ'ikat al-qods*), and the lower hierarchy of the Celestial Souls, which he designates as Angels of Magnificence (*malâ'ikat al-'izza*). The Celestial Souls have no faculty of sensory perception, but possess imagination in its purest form.

Upon reaching the level of the tenth Intelligence, the energy of emanation is exhausted and the tenth Intelligence breaks up into a multitude of human souls, whilst from its dimension of potential being proceeds sublunar matter. The tenth Intelligence is both the active Intelligence of the philosophers and the Angel-Holy Spirit of the prophets. The relationship between the Intelligences and the Souls that proceed from them is described as a relationship between domination (*qahr*) and loving obedience (*mahabbat*). 'From then on, it is seized by desire, love (*'ishq*), which carries it towards that which is not yet realised within it, towards its principle of perfectio n[254].'

Furthermore, a whole series of correspondences is established between the dual hierarchy of the Intelligences, the Souls and the Heavens, and the faculties of man. Each human soul stands in the same relationship to the active Intellect as each celestial Soul does to the Intellect from which it proceeds. Similarly, the practical intellect (*'aql 'amalî*) stands in the same relationship to the contemplative or theoretical intellect (*'aql nazarî*) as the Heaven does to the celestial Soul that governs it. These two sets of homologies perfectly confirm the correspondence between cosmology and anthropology in Avicenna's metaphysics[255] .



b) Angelology

The First Cause, or First Intelligence, appears under various names and forms in Islamic philosophy. At times it is the First Intellect, which, in Avicenna's *The *Story of Hayy ibn Yaqzân**, is the First of the Cherubim. In Ismaili theosophy, it is called the Archangel of the Nearest or the Most Holy. In the philosophy of Sohrawardî, it is named Bahman (*Vohu Manu*), which is the name of the first of the Zoroastrian Archangels[256] .

What is *angelology*, and what is its significance in monotheistic religions in general?
According to Corbin, monotheism contradicts itself if it dispenses with angelology. The vision of the Angel saves theophany from the double trap of *ta'tîl* and *tashbîh*. The Angel is the hermeneut of the hidden worlds, of the planes of being that lie above earthly man. Man's ascent towards the origin takes place under the guidance of the Angel (the Angel's *soteriological* function, which derives from its hermeneutical function): 'inasmuch as each Angel draws towards himself the loving Soul that proceeds from him, and inasmuch as the active Intelligence draws out of the "West" towards the "East" the souls that proceed from her and turn towards her. It is this very thing that makes knowledge a gnosis, and this gnosis the fruit of an angelic pedagogy[257]'

The hermeneutic function corresponds to the eschatological function of the Angel. The former unveils
the world of the soul; the second leads it towards its original homeland. Avicennism proposes to the earthly pilgrim, as the supreme goal, the attainment of the dignity wherein he shall become an *'âlam 'aqlî* or an *intelligible world.*

Apophatic theology is necessary to avoid anthropomorphism, and affirmative theology is only possible through *angelology*. It frees us from the twin traps of agnosticism and anthropomorphism by establishing a link between the Being and the creature: without it, the divine Names and Attributes would have no means of manifesting themselves. Angelology resolves the very paradox of theophany: on the one hand, the refusal of any vision, as opposed to Moses ('You shall not see me'), and on the other, the prophet's affirmation: 'I have seen my Lord in the most beautiful of forms[258] . It is precisely this paradox that will be analysed by a devotee of Love such as Rûzbehân of Shîrâz as the very mystery of amphiboly.

The mediation of the Angel also brings about individuation, through which the self encounters its heavenly counterpart. This conjunction with the Inner Guide is the reintegration of the totality of being, or as Corbin puts it, the 'bi-unity of their original unity'. It requires a world of its own, a suitable space where the human soul and the Companion Angel can *imagine* one another. Hence the need for a world capable of materialising the Angel's thought. "The body of which they (the celestial souls) dispose and which 'materialises' the thought of the same Archangel is of a celestial matter, a subtle and incorruptible *quintia essentia*. For this reason, and because, unlike human imaginations, they are not dependent on sensible knowledge, their imaginations are true[259]."

The soul aspires to unite with the Intelligence from which it emanates, just as the disciple loves to conform to the
the master whom he reveres, or the lover uniting with his beloved. And the desire that sets the sphere of beings in perpetual, circular motion is the desire for love and the longing to return. Here is what Avicenna himself says on the matter: the 'Soul must grasp the beauty of the object it loves; the image of this beauty increases the ardour of love; this ardour causes the soul to look upwards, and from there arises a movement by which it may apply itself to the object with which it wishes to assimilate. Thus the imagination of beauty causes the ardour of love, love causes desire, and desire causes the movemen t[260] ".

c) Gnosology

When the procession of the Intelligences descends to the Xth Intelligence (that which falls to humanity), the emanating Energy shows signs of exhaustion. The Xth Intelligence produces the multitude of human souls, which respectively represent the Intelligence and the Soul. 'Now, this multitude of souls consists of individualities which, unlike the single Soul of each heaven, differ only *numerically* but are identical in kind[261].'

Thus the human intellect has a structure analogous to that of the Angel. The human intellect
It is in fact divided into two main categories: the contemplative or theoretical intellect (*'aql nazarî*) and the practical intellect (*'aql 'amalî*). Whilst the former is that faculty of the soul which receives the essence of universal things, the practical intellect, on the other hand, brings about particular acts of understanding. To the former belong judgements; to the latter, particular acts and particular acts of understanding. The practical intellect is to the contemplative intellect as the Heaven of the soul is to the motor soul that governs it.

Furthermore, the contemplative intellect comprises four degrees. 1) The 'intellect in potential' (*'aql hayûlânî*) or the material intellect, that is to say, it is in the same state as a matter in potential with regard to any form; 2) It comes into actuality through sensations and images and becomes the 'intellect in actuality' (*'aql bi'l-fi'l*), thereby making the intelligible form 'present in actuality'; 3) It becomes the 'acquired intellect' (*'aql mostafâd*), or the intellect that has acquired knowledge through actualisation originating from the outside. The outside is the Active Intellect itself, which radiates the intelligible forms into it; 4) Finally, through frequent and constant conjunction (*itisâl*) with the Active Intellect, it then becomes the 'holy intellect' (*'aql qodsî*), which is the highest of all intelligences, or the *holy faculty* (*qowwa qodsîya*), the highest of all faculties, the very one that is the preserve of prophec e[262] . The Active Intellect is also synonymous with *Rûh* or *the Holy Spirit* (*rûh al-qodsîya*) which, Avicenna tells us, 'receives the intelligibles from the Angelic Spirit without instruction from men', that is to say, through the immediacy of intuitive knowledge.

The active Intellect, whose function is to bring material (potential) intelligence from potentiality into actuality by illuminating it—just as light brings the eyes, which remained in potentiality in the darkness, into the act of seeing—is described as *active*. Hence the designation
'Bestower of Forms' (*wâhib al-sowar*), since it radiates upon potential intelligence the intelligible forms actualised in thought. Our contemplative intellect is to the active Intellect as the motor soul is to the Intellect from which it emanates. Insofar as the soul receives illumination from the Angel, its cogitative action is rather a *passion*; its *cogito* is in reality a *cogitor*. 'The idea of *the Dator formarum* implies that *to understand* the Angel is *to be understood* by him, since this requires that he himself radiate his own Form upon the soul that understands him. *The Ego*, the subject of *the Cogitor*, is no longer *the* "egotising" *ego* of man without [the Angel263].'

The Angel may take on several names: Active Intelligence, Gabriel, Angel of Humanity, Spiritual Adam, but it is always the same celestial figure that appears. Whether it be the conjunction of the prophetic soul with the Active Intelligence or the descent of the 'supreme Nâmûs', that is to say, of the Angel Gabriel upon the prophets, we are always dealing with this same key figure, of whom Corbin has, moreover, shown the manifold examples in Islamic thought.

Man's spiritual individuality is preserved, for a spiritual companionship is established between the Angel-Holy Spirit and the souls emanating from him. "Here they are partners in the same struggle, in the same pilgrimage, which the conclusion of *the Tale of the Western Exile* typifies as an ascent from one spiritual Sinai to another, superimposed one upon the other[264]."

Because of his pedagogical role, the Angel strives to reintegrate souls into their spiritual realm

its own (*'âlam 'aqlî*), because human souls, like celestial souls, are Strangers, Exiles. By imitating the celestial Angel, the human soul breaks free from its exile through a movement that draws it towards the Angel, its inner Guide. But it is up to the human soul whether it becomes an angel or a demon in practice.

Furthermore, all pedagogy is also accompanied by a soteriology. What had a cosmological function in the theoretical treatises of Avicenna and Sohrawardî will assume an eminently soteriological role in the mystical narratives of our thinkers. It is therefore no coincidence that at the end of *the Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân*, the Angel says to his disciple: 'If you wish, follow me i[265].'

All this clearly shows that on the question of *the Noûs poietikos*, which has divided interpreters of Aristotle from the outset, Avicenna, unlike St Thomas, opted for an intelligence separate from and extrinsic to the human Intellect, without for that reason identifying it with the concept of God as the Augustinians did.

CHAPTER III
Latin Avicennism

Avicennism failed in the West. Its doctrine of knowledge based on angelology provoked alarm and a 'fear of the Angel'. By entrusting the prophetic vocation to the philosopher, Avicenna's philosophy endowed the individual with an autonomy that was incompatible with the privileges of the Church's magisterium. Avicenna's Neoplatonic angelology, with the cosmology it implied, frightened the doctors of medieval scholasticism and made it virtually impossible for Avicennism to be integrated into it. On the other hand, Avicenna's gnoseology, owing to the major importance it accorded to the Angel of Knowledge, encroached upon the domain of divine prerogatives. Conversely, if Avicennism was able to take root in Iran and transform into theosophical Avicennism (*ishrâqî*), the reason was that it was specifically oriented towards a prophesiology through which philosopher and prophet found a common vocation, and in which the illuminator of the sage and the inspirer of the prophet merged in the common crucible of the Niche of Prophetic Lights.

'Yet,' says Corbin, 'at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, there existed a kind of pure Latin Avicennism, of which a few texts survive. This Avicennism sought to preserve in its entirety the philosopher's *noetics*, which is an aspect of his cosmology and angelology.' To understand the reason for this failure, however, one need only refer to the sarcasms of Guillaume d'Auvergne.

In another direction, Avicennism exerted a significant influence, but at the cost of a radical distortion. It was replaced by a 'hybrid' that Étienne Gilson rightly described as 'Avicennianised Augustinianism'. This amalgam consisted of substituting God himself for the Angel-Holy Spirit of Avicennism. Thus, Avicenna's angelology was rejected, whilst the idea of a human intellect that is purely passive in the face of illumination coming from outside was retained. Now, if one accepts that the Active Intellect is not a faculty of the soul and if one also rejects the Averroist solution, 'all that remains is to transfer the illuminating function of the Active Intellect to God'. The most perfect example of this type of Avicennian was Roger Bacon. He undoubtedly tended to confuse the notion of God as the original source of all illumination with what the theologians of his time called the Active Intellect, but this did not prevent him from openly claiming the patronage of Avicenna, whom he placed far above Averroes. In short, the representatives of Avicennian Augustinianism could best be defined in these terms: 'They are the theologians who, under the influence of Avicenna, borrow Aristotelian terminology to formulate the Augustinian theory of illuminatio n[266] .' From this convergence arose the doctrine of God as the Active Intellect.

The transfer of God to the Active Intellect, distorting the premises of Avicenna's doctrine, led to a radical alteration of his conception. Consequently, the entire edifice that articulated the links between cosmology, gnoseology and soteriology collapsed.

Duns Scotus criticised Avicenna for what constitutes the Gnostic originality of his thought, namely that religion and philosophy draw from the same source. Furthermore, the 'mytho-poetic' dimension of his visionary narratives was, in part, the Gnostic realisation of the pedagogical vocation of the Active Intellect. Avicenna's project did not merely aim at reconciling Greek philosophy (*falsafa*) and Semitic wisdom (*hikma*), as Louis Massigno maintains n[267] , but established a different destiny in which the 'phenomenology of angelic consciousness' develops from the initial act of cosmology

through to the angelology of knowledge, finally culminating in the mystical experience of a soteriology.

If one reflects on Avicenna's *The Story of the Bird* and the character of Absâl, it seems impossible to dispute the fact that Avicenna attained a spiritual realisation distinctly different from theoretical knowledge. His doctrine of the conjunction and spiritual growth of man only serves to confirm its validity. If one reflects on the progression of the soul, as expressed in Avicenna's doctrine of the Intellect, one understands that it is true to say 'that at its summit every act of knowledge becomes a e prayer[268]'.

CHAPTER IV
Sohrawardî
and 'Eastern' theosophy

The bond between Corbin and Sohrawardî is a profound one. Sohrawardî was his unseen mentor. Just as, in reviving the 'theosophy of the Enlightenment of the Sages of ancient Persia', Sohrawardî did not act or think merely as a historian, so too the phenomenologist Corbin, in rethinking the Iranian-Islamic spiritual heritage from its living sources, would *take up* his *mantle*. Speaking of this pivotal moment, Corbin writes: 'He (Sohrawardî) does not deliberate on concepts, influences, or detectable or disputable historical traces. He *is* simply *there*: he makes his presence felt. He takes charge of the past of ancient Zoroastrian Iran, thereby bringing it into the present. It is not a past without a future, with all material connections severed. He restores a future to this past, a future which he himself begins to embody because he feels responsible for this past (…). From now on, the sages of ancient Persia, the *Khosrovânîyûn*, are in truth the precursors of *the Ishrâqîyûn* (the Platonists) of Islamic Iran (…). The intrepidity, certainly, of a young man of thirty-five whose act of presence (the *Dasein*) provokes and legitimises the reversal of the past into the future, because it is the entire future of this past that is reconstituted as the present, in the present of his 'act of presence'. And this is *the historically true* ' '[269].

What is Sohrawardî's relationship with Iran? What is the genealogy of his thought? How does he succeed in coming to terms with Iran's past?

Shihâboddîn Yahyâ Sohrawardî, known as *Shaykh al-Ishrâq*, meaning 'the master of Eastern theosophy', was born in 1155 in north-western Iran, in Sohraward, in the province of Jabal, near Azerbaijan, the ancient land of the Medes. He died a martyr in Aleppo, a victim of the intolerance and fanaticism of the doctors of the Law, in 587/1191, at the age of thirty-six. His entire body of work is dedicated to a single task: to restore, at any cost, the theosophical wisdom of ancient Persia to Islamic Iran, that is to say, to repatriate the Hellenised Magi to their land of origin. Some four centuries before the great Byzantine Gemistus Plethon, his work brought together for the first time the names of Plato and Zarathustra in a metaphysics of Light, in which Platonic Ideas are interpreted in terms of Mazdean angelology.

His body of work, despite his early death, is considerable. The list compiled by Shahrazûrî, his devoted biographer, comprises some fifty titles of works and treatises, a large proportion of which have been preserved[270].

Here is what Sohrawardî says in the prologue to his **Hikmat al-Ishrâq**:

'This Knowledge (*'ilm al-anwâr*, Knowledge of the Pure Lights) was, in fact, the inner experience (*dhawq*) of Plato, the Imam and leader of Wisdom (*imâm al-hikmat wa ra'îsuha*), a man endowed with great strength and inner Light. So it had been in earlier times, from Hermes, the father of the theosophical Sages, right up to the time of Plato himself, for other eminent theosophers, pillars of Wisdom, such as Empedocles, Pythagoras and a few others besides. Now, the doctrines of these ancient Sages were presented in the form of symbols. Therefore, there is no refutation against them. Even if one claims to argue against the exoteric appearance of their

doctrines, one does not thereby encounter their true intentions, for one does not refute symbols. Now, it was precisely on the symbol that the *Eastern* doctrine (*qâ'idat al-ishrâq*) concerning Light and Darkness was founded, a doctrine which constituted the teaching proper to the Sages of ancient Persia, such as Jâmasp, Frashoshtra, Bozorgmehr and others before them.

'But this doctrine of the Ancient Sages of Persia must not be confused with the fundamental dogma of the impious Mazdean Magi, nor with the extremism of Mani, nor with any doctrine leading to a pluralisation of the Divine Principle.'

'Do not imagine that Wisdom (*hikmat*) is present in this age that is close to us and that it did not exist in another. No! The world has never been, nor will it ever be, deprived of Wisdom, nor of a person (*shakhs*) who preserves its proofs and testimonies in the world. It is this person who is God's vicegerent on His earth. And so it shall be as long as the heavens and the earth endure.

'The difference between the Ancient Sages and those who succeeded them in more recent times is a difference of vocabulary (*al-alfâz*), a difference that also lies in their respective methods, whether by directly expounding their thoughts (*tasrîh*) or by presenting them under the veil of symbolic allusions (*ta'rîd*). But all affirmed the existence of three worlds. All agreed on the affirmation of the One (*al-tawhîd*); there is no contradiction between them regarding the sources of problems (*'usûl al-masâ'il*) (…).

'There are several degrees (of Wisdom); they form a hierarchy (*tabaqât*), and are distributed as follows.

'There is the theosophist (*hakîm ilâhî*) who has penetrated very deeply into mystical experience (*tâ'alloh*), but who lacks philosophical knowledge (*bahth*).

"There is the philosopher (*hakîm*) who is a master of philosophical speculation, but lacks mystical experience.

"There is the theosophist who has penetrated deeply into both mystical experience and philosophical knowledge (…).

"If, at a given time, there appears a Sage who is deeply versed in both mystical experience and philosophical knowledge, it is to him that earthly authority (*al-ri'âsat*) belongs, and he is the Khalifah of God." (*The Book of Eastern Wisdom*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–90.)

Several conclusions can be drawn from this text: Sohrawardî reveals the lineage and genealogy of his thought, drawing on both Greek and Iranian sources; he teaches us that wisdom, or *hikmat*, will always exist without interruption, since we are dealing here with a phenomenon of *philosophia perennis*; he shows us that in the hierarchy (*tabaqât*) of the Sages, the pinnacle is that which combines both mystical experience and philosophical knowledge.

1) Genealogy of *Ishrâq*

In his book *Motârahât* (*Physics, Book VI*), Sohrawardî speaks of the great tree of Wisdom, whose branches never cease to grow and spread, driven by a mysterious sap that Sohrawardî calls the 'Eternal Leaven' (*al-khamîrat al-azalîya*), which rises from spirit to spirit. 'We have entrusted,' says Sohrawardî, 'the science of True Reality to our book entitled *Eastern Theosophy*, a book in which we have revived the ancient wisdom that has always served as the cornerstone for the Imams of India, Persia (*Fars*), Chaldea, and Egypt, as well as for the ancient Greeks up to Plato, and from which they derived their own theosophy; this wisdom is the Eternal Leaven[271]."

This 'Eternal Leaven' leads Sohrawardî to sketch out the 'family tree' of the *Ishrâqîyûn*.

Any distinction between Greek sages and Eastern sages disappears. Both are the ‘guardians of *the* Logos’ on the Western and Eastern sides. Corbin depicts this family tree as follows, based on the Shaykh’s own instructions.

At the root of the tree stands Hermes, the Father of the Sages. On the eastern side are the ancient Persian Sages (the *Pahlawîyûn*): Gayomart, the primordial king; next come the two heroes whose epic deeds, predating those of Zoroaster, are already mentioned in the Avesta. Then come the wise kings, Fereydûn and Kay Khosraw. The ecstatic sages, the *khosrawânîyûn*, will be named after the latter. The legacy of *the khosrawânîyûn* will be passed down to Sohrawardî himself through three masters of Sufism, namely Abû Yazîd Bastâmî, Mansûr Hallâj and Abû’l-Hassan Kharraqânî.

On the western side, this intellectual current passes through Asclepius, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato; thanks to the Pythagoreans, it finds its way into Islam through Akhî Akhmîm (Dhû’l-Nûn Misrî) and Abû Sahl Tostarî. Ultimately, the two strands converge like the curves of a cypress tree at its summit within the *Ishrâqîyûn* school, whose discourse serves as the vehicle for the *Sakîna*[272] . The *Sakîna* (Presence) is, moreover, identified by Sohrawardî both with the concept of *Xvarnah*, the Zoroastrian Light of Glory, and with the
prophetic ‘Niche of Lights’. In this way, the Greek philosophers, just like the Persian Sages, have
drew their knowledge from the same ‘Niche of Light’ (*mishkât al-nobowwat*). It is, therefore, the same *intellectus sanctus* that inspires both prophet and philosopher, the same Angel-Spirit who is both the Angel of Knowledge and the Angel of Revelation.

Sohrawardî’s dual project consists of bringing the Hellenised Magi back to Islamic Iran and leading the Greek philosophers back to the Niche of the Prophetic Lights of Islam.

Sohrawardî himself becomes the creative focal point of an encounter between Iranianism and Hellenism within the *Ishrâq* tradition. These two complementary aspects essentially constitute the theosophical doctrine of Shaykh al-Ishrâq: the desire to integrate the tradition of Iranian prophecy into the Abrahamic tradition of the Bible and the Qur’an, and, on the other hand, to lead Plato and the Platonic tradition back to the Iranian theosophy of light.

2) Sohrawardî and Iran

What is *historically true* about the revival of ancient Persian wisdom is that, by embracing Iran’s past, Sohrawardî becomes its *history* himself, just as he heralds its future. The Iranian people are not ‘Eastern’ simply because they live geographically to the east of the Islamic world; they are ‘Eastern’ because they carry within them the eternal leaven of ‘Eastern’ wisdom. Sohrawardî discovers this East in the soul of Iran in the form of the Light of Glory, the royal *Xvarnah* that once haloed the wise rulers of Zoroastrian Iran. The way in which he depicts the ‘Eastern’ lineage of the ancient Magi does not fall within the realm of the philosophy of history, nor does it submit to the laws of historical causality. It is not an ethnic principle that he affirms, but, as Corbin rightly points out, a ‘hieratic ancestry’.

Here is what he himself says in *The *Book of the Word of Sufism**: ‘Among the ancient Persians there was a community whose members were guided by the Truth and who, through it, observed justice (7:159). They were eminent Sages, not to be confused with the Magi (*Majûs*). It is their lofty philosophy of Light—as evidenced, moreover, by Plato’s personal experience and that of other earlier Sages—that we have revived in our book entitled the ‘Book of Eastern Theosophy’. And I have had no predecessor for anything of the [sort273].’

Sohrawardî believes that the Prophet and the heroes of ancient Persia also shared in the prophetic destiny foretold in the sacred history of the “People of the Book”. He thus assigns to

the wisdom of ancient Zoroastrian Persia the same mediating role that Salmân the Persian (Salmân Farsî) assumed between the Iranian community and the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-Bayt*).

He goes even further; he applies *ta'wîl* to the hieratic figures of Iran's heroic epic. Consequently, the deeds of the heroes of the Avesta and Ferdowsî's *Shahnâmeh* (10^{th} century) also fall within the scope of the Book.

One can thus imagine that Sohrawardî read the *Shahnameh* in the same way that mystics read the Bible or the Qur'an, that is to say, as if it had been composed for his own sake s[274] . The narrative is relived as a meta-history of the soul, culminating in a personal mystical experience. It is because of all these characteristics that Sohrawardî's emergence in the philosophical life of Islamic Persia was of such importance that its mark has never faded. He shaped both the destiny of Islamic philosophy and that of the people who were to bear its burden, and this continues to the present day.

CHAPTER V
The Conjunction of Philosophy and Mystical Experience

The mystical dimension of Avicenna's thought was too fragmented for the question of the complementarity of theoretical knowledge and mystical experience to be raised explicitly and unequivocally. With Sohrawardî, the very idea of philosophy took on a whole new meaning; it became the 'royal path', the middle ground uniting and combining the theoretical and exoteric knowledge of the philosophers with the esoteric spiritual realisation of the mystics. For the Shaykh, uniting philosophy and spirituality became an imperative of the soul. The ecstatic heroes who embody this truth are now Plato, Hermes, Kay Khosraw, Zoroaster and Muhammad: the Greek prophet as much as the Iranian and Arab prophet. The path they describe is that of gnosis; it leads the pilgrim to direct vision. It is the path of the 'race of seers' which leads to *ta'alloh*, that is to say, *apotheosis* or gnosis. It is the path that leads the Western exile to the mystical Sinai. It is a 'royal path' (*sirât mostaqîm*) that deviates neither to the right nor to the left[275] .

From the very beginning of his prologue to *Eastern Theosophy*, Sohrawardî defines the true sage as one who possesses both speculative knowledge and mystical experience.

Hence the adage repeated by all Iranian thinkers that *Ishrâqî* theosophy is to philosophy what Sufism is to *kalâm*, that is to say, to the dialectical scholasticism of Islam.

As for the lineage of the ancient Persians, the term 'royal path' is attributed to Kay Khosraw, the visionary Sage-King who, by embarking upon it, marked the transition from the heroic epic to the mystical epic; it will therefore be the path of *the Khosrawânîyûn (see below*, Book IV).

As for the essential characteristics of the *Ishrâqî* doctrine, according to Corbin they are as follows:

1) A desire to reconnect with the theosophy of Light professed by the ancient Sages of Iran.

2) This resurrection presupposes the convergence of the two paths of theoretical and mystical knowledge into the *royal* path.

3) That knowledge is not merely theoretical but also a knowledge 'Eastern', even redemptive.

1) The Easts and the Wests

The word *Ishrâq* that Sohrawardî gives to his philosophy should not be interpreted in the geographical sense of the term. The East is the place where the Light arises. The Light is the unveiling of 'the primordial epiphany of being'. It therefore refers to the splendour of dawn, the 'morning' illumination. The wisdom that arises from this illuminating east is thus a 'Eastern wisdom' insofar as it guides the adept from abstract knowledge—characterised by the mediation of a representative form (*'ilm sûrî*)—towards a presence that is immediate and illuminative, being none other than the East of the soul. This knowledge is illuminative because it is *Eastern*. In common usage, this illumination stands in contrast to the representative knowledge of the Peripatetics, since the *Ishrâqîyûn* are also Neoplatonists.

Every pilgrim is a seeker of the East (*mostashriq*) and every quest a journey towards the East

(*istishrâq*)[276]. The mystical pilgrim is a seeker of the East who, from vision to vision, from ecstasy to ecstasy (these ecstasies are called 'minor death'), ascends through the 'Orients' that rise one after another until reaching the 'major death'. Death in the Western world occurs when the soul rises definitively to its Heaven.

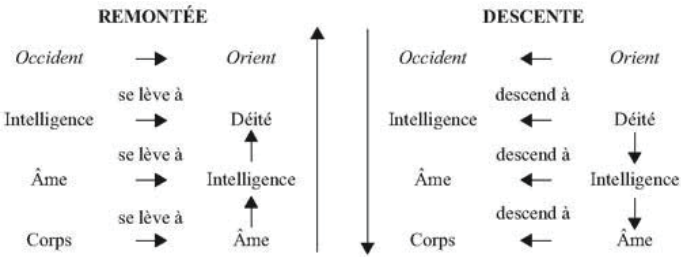
The spiritual realms, which are arranged in multiple worlds, are designated respectively as 'Greater East' (*al-sharq al-akbar*) or the spiritual Far East, and 'Lesser East' (*al-sharq al-asghar*). The physical world is the West, where souls decline. The East is simultaneously principle and end (*arkhe* and *telos*), Origin and Return, the keystones of the two arches of the Descent (*nozûl*) and the Ascent (*so'ûd*).

Thus, in the descending order of the procession of Being, the Intelligences arise in *the East*, or the horizon of the Deity; the Souls arise in the East of the Intelligences. Human souls decline in the West of the darkness of Matter. That is to say, in the land of exile, typified by the city of Qayrawân in the *Tale of the Western Exile*.

Conversely, in the arc of the Ascent towards the Origin (*so'ûd* and *ma'âd*), each ascent is symbolised by a death in *the West* and a rising in *the East*. The soul rises to its 'minor East', which is the world of the soul, simultaneously fading from the horizon of the body, which was for it the West; then it rises to the 'greater East', which is the world of the Intelligences. It thus rises higher than the world of the soul, which now becomes a *West* in relation to the 'Eastern Intelligence' (*al-'aql al-mashriqî*).

Between these two *Easts* lies the 'Middle East' (*al-sharq al-awsat*), the central East which is none other than the 'eighth climate' that Sohrawardî, in his writings, refers to by the Persian term *Nâ kojâ âbâd* (the Land of Nowhere). This encompasses the entire realm of *the Malakût* rising to the soul, lying between it and the West into which souls lost in darkness stray s[277] .

Souls and Intelligences symbolise, respectively, the two 'lesser East' and 'greater East' (*mashriqânî*), because *the East* is the place where the Light rises, and whilst the Intelligences rise on the horizon of the Deity, the Souls, for their part, rise on the horizon of the Intelligences. There is thus a succession of Easts and Wests in the Descent and then in the Ascent of the soul. 'Just as it declines from one horizon to another until its western exile, so the soul rises from one world to another in an ascending series of mornings and illuminations s[278] . ' This is *istishrâq*, the quest of the East from ecstasy to ecstasy, or the vertical journey through the 'Orients' to the final ecstasy in the 'Greater East'.



2) Presentational knowledge and representational knowledge

Among Islamic thinkers, thought has three sources of validity corresponding to their levels

respectively. Tradition (*naql*), which is a particular source of nourishment for theology. The intellect (*'aql*), which inspires philosophical dialectics, such as those of *kalâm* and *falsafa*. Finally, what is known as unveiling (*kashf*) or intuitive vision, or 'hierognosis', which is the manifestation of first principles, the source constituting theosophy (*hikmat ilâhîya*) and mystical gnosis (*'irfân*) [279] .

Eastern knowledge (*'ilm ishrâqî*) is both the goal and the means of the Quest of the pilgrim of the East (*mostashriq*). Eastern knowledge is also a presentational knowledge (*'ilm hozûrî*) which stands in contrast to representational knowledge (*sûrî*), the latter of which, moreover, conforms to the Peripatetic theory of knowledge. Presential knowledge, on the other hand, does not have a logical universal as its object, but is unitive, intuitive, and presential (*ittisâlî, shohûdî, hozûri*)[280] .

When the veil is lifted, the soul reveals its truth, projecting its own illumination (*ishrâq hozûrî*) upon the object; and by making the object present through its own presence, it reveals it to itself without the mediation of any intermediary. When the object is before the gaze and every veil interposing itself is lifted, the soul experiences a 'presentational illumination of the object'. The soul knows it immediately because it is itself present within it, not through the intermediary of a form e[281] .

Knowledge, being illumination (*ishrâq*), is also 'making present' (*istihzâr*).

On the other hand, the faculty of 'making present' is proportional to the degree of separation (*tajarrod*), that is to say, the subject's liberation from the matter of this world. The more the soul isolates itself, that is to say, the more it abstracts itself from matter, the more it is dominated by light. At the summit of the hierarchy of Being is the 'Light of Lights', whose isolation transcends all isolation. For it is from the self-existence of this 'Light of Lights' that springs forth the Light which the ancient Persians called *Xvarnah* and which gives precedence to beings over one another[282].

Sohrawardî tells us in his Book of *Elucidations* (*Talwîhât*) that he acquired this knowledge from Aristotle in a dream. But the Aristotle with whom our Shaykh converses is an Aristotle marked by a strong Platonic influence, whom no one could hold responsible for the discursive arguments that characterise the historical Aristotle.

Aristotle's first reply to the enquiring scholar is this: 'Awaken to yourself. ' Thus begins a gradual initiation into self-knowledge, but a knowledge that is neither the result of abstraction nor of a representation of the object through a form, but a knowing that is identical to the soul itself. It is an illuminative knowledge through which the soul sees itself, and in so doing, transforms all things into symbols. In response to the seeker's final questions, Aristotle replies that the philosophers of Islam have not equalled Plato by a thousandth of a degree. Then, referring to the two great Sufis Abû Yazîd Bastâmî and Sahl Tostarî, he declares: 'Yes, they are the philosophers in the true sense[283].'

Eastern knowledge is therefore a saving, redemptive knowledge, for its organ in the human being is the sacred intellect (*'aql qodsî*). It is a knowledge that brings about the transmutation of all material data, manifesting itself in the *mundus imaginalis* of the soul. It is, therefore, a transfiguration of the senses.

a) The transfiguration of the senses

Sohrawardî writes in *the Epistle on the State of Childhood*[284]: "The soul deprives the ear of its auditory function, and listens directly itself. It is then in the other world that it listens, for having auditory perception of the other world is no longer a matter for the ear. " Sohrawardî also calls this hearing 'inner vision'. In his Persian account: *A Day with a Group of Sufis*[285] , the Shaykh continues: 'When the eye of inner vision (*dîdeh-ye andarûnî*) is opened, one must close

the eye of outward vision (*dîdeh-ye zâhir*) must be turned away from all things, and the lips must be sealed. One must renounce the five senses. Instead, one must put the inner senses into action, so that, if this patient perceives anything, he may perceive it through the *inner* hand. If he sees anything, let him see it through the inner eyes. If he hears anything, let him hear it through the inner hearing. If he perceives any scent, let him perceive it through the inner sense of smell, and let his inner taste be of the nature of the soul. When this spiritual state is realised, he can continuously contemplate the secret of the spiritual heavens (*sirr-e âsmân-hâ*, the esoteric or the *Malakût* of the heavens). At all times, he is in communication with the supersensible world."

Entering into communication with the supersensible world amounts to awakening the physiology of the subtle organs of the inner man, whose senses are transfigured into spiritual senses. It also means substituting *the imaginatio vera* for the imagination.

This knowledge, being *gnosis*, acquires an eschatological dimension; it henceforth perceives all things in their *otherworldly* dimension, 'between Heaven and Earth', in contrast to the philosophers of this world who are unable to penetrate beyond the threshold of this world. Thus, to the eye of the one who truly sees, the world becomes "a workshop for producing the transcendent, the invisible" (*kâr-khâneh-ye mojarrad sâzî*)[286] .

For Mollâ Abdorrahîm Damâvandî (17^{th} century), by theosophy, it will be understood as a knowledge in which God is no longer the object of deliberation, as is the case with ordinary philosophers (*rasmî*), but the active subject of acts of knowing. This is a form of knowledge that transcends intellectual understanding; it is, therefore, a revelation (*kashf*). This is the state of the theosophist (*hakîm mota'allih*) and the mystics (*'orafâ'*), who are opposed in this respect to philosophers and theologians (*motakallim*). Science (*'ilm*) is equivalent to *knowing* God, and gnosis (*ma'rifat*) is *attaining* God. There is a difference between knowing (*dânestan*, Persian) and attaining (*rasîdan*). Although, as Corbin points out, Damâvandî does not mention it explicitly, we also find in his work the classical distinction, dating back to Sohrawardî, between presentational knowledge and representational knowledge. The former is the effacement of the forms of the known object. With the form of the object gone, what remains is the pure presence of the soul, which knows itself immediately. From this he deduces that this form of knowledge is a divine gift (*mowhibatî*) as opposed to the acquired (*kasbî*) nature of the other. The theosophist attains God through intuitive perception (*kashf*) by virtue of the inner worship practised in the heart (*'ibâdat-e qalbîye*) and not because of the outward worship practised by the body (*'ibâdat-e qalibîye*). For theosophical knowledge to be actualised, the Sage must first have undergone the transfiguration of the senses described in the *hadith*: 'I am the sight through which he sees…' Having reached this supreme level, the mystic rises to the rank of prophetic theosophy and thus becomes an heir to the prophets[287] .

CHAPTER VI
Mollâ Sadrâ
or the theosophy of presence as testimony

Mollâ Sadrâ, says Corbin, could be called the ‘Saint Thomas of Iran, if a Saint Thomas could be a blend of Jacob Boehme and Swedenborg’. Sadroddîn Mohammad Shîrâzî, more commonly known by his honorary title of Molla Sadra, is one of the greatest figures of the Isfahan School during the Safavid era. Born in Shiraz in 1572, he studied in Isfahan, the brilliant intellectual and political capital of the Safavid dynasty, whose reputation led its inhabitants to say that ‘Isfahan is half the world’ (*Esfahan, nesf-e jahân*). In Isfahan, Mulla Sadra had three illustrious teachers whose names left an indelible mark on the history of Iranian thought. Firstly, Shaykh Bahâ’oddîn ’Amilî (also known as Shaykh-e Bahâ’î, d. 1031/1621), who taught him the traditional Islamic sciences s[288] .

The other teacher who had a great influence on Mulla Sadra was the great Mir Damad (d. 1040/1630), under whom he studied the philosophical and speculative sciences. The students had given their teacher the honorary title of *Mo’allim thâlith*, *Magister tertius*, to highlight his standing in the succession of great philosophers in relation to Aristotle (*Magister Primus*) and Fârâbî (*Magister Secundus)*[289] .

Mollâ Sadrâ’s third teacher was Mîr Abûl-Qâsim Fendereskî, who died in Isfahan in 1640, and who was involved in the translation of Sanskrit works into Persian during the golden age of relations between India and Iran under the illustrious reign of Akbar Shah h [290].

Disheartened by the hostility of fanatics, Sadrâ withdrew to a deserted place. He would say in the introduction to his great work: ‘When I had observed the hostility one incurs these days for seeking to reform the ignorant and the uneducated, seeing the infernal fire of stupidity and aberration blazing in all its glory (…) and having encountered the incomprehension of people blind to the Enlightenment and the secrets of wisdom (…) people whose gaze has never strayed beyond the limits of material evidence (…), then this stifling of intelligence and this freezing of nature resulting from the hostility of our age compelled me to withdraw to a remote region t[291] .”

Mollâ Sadrâ fought a battle on two fronts: on the one hand, he confronted the ignorant Sufis of his time who, scornful of the value of dialectics, indulged in a kind of sterile idleness; and, on the other hand, he engaged in a relentless struggle against the fanatics who sought to establish a religion stripped of its inner meaning. These doctors of the Law forced him to flee Isfahan and take refuge in the solitude of Kahak. What he sought to establish was that ‘royal path’ which Sohrawardî had professed long before him. To this end, Mulla Sadra explains very clearly the two complementary roles that philosophical revelation and meditation must play. If Qur’anic revelation is the light that enables seeing, and the Imam’s teaching specifically lifts the veil, then philosophy is the eye that contemplates this light. For the phenomenon of vision to occur, there must be light and eyes that see that very light. If the light is removed, the eyes will see nothing; but if, on the other hand, one closes one’s eyes as fanatics and doctors of the Law do, one will remain just as much in

darkness. In both cases, we are faced with the blindness of true vision. Only within Islam has the Shī'ī school, by virtue of its guaranteeing this harmony and drawing upon the 'Niche of Prophetic Lights', been able to preserve this middle path, which is also a 'prophetic philosophy ' [292]. Hence its method of the in-between (*bayn al-tarîqayn*), which unites Qur'anic revelation and philosophical meditation. 'What is most appropriate,' he says, 'is for the pilgrim of God (*al-sâlik ilâ'llâh*) to synthesise the two methods. Let his inner asceticism (*tasfîya*) never be devoid of philosophical meditation (*tafakkor*); and conversely, let his meditation never be without an effort at inner purification[293]." This is precisely the doctrine professed by Sohrawardî in the prologue to his great *Book of Eastern Theosophy*.

Disappointed by the blindness of the doctors of the Law, Mulla Sadra withdrew to a complex of gardens, on the edge of the desert, near Qôm. This place of retreat, known as Kahak, played a decisive role in the development of his personal experiences. During the nine to eleven years he spent at Kahak, Mulla Sadra attained that personal realisation without which theoretical knowledge is, alas, nothing but a vain and futile pursuit.

'When I had persisted,' he writes, 'in this state of retreat, of *incognito* and separation from the world, for a prolonged period, lo and behold, at length my inner effort brought my soul to incandescence; through my repeated spiritual exercises, my heart was set ablaze with lofty flames. Then the lights of *the Malakût* (the angelic world) poured forth upon my soul (…) : all the metaphysical secrets that I had hitherto known through rational demonstration, I now perceived intuitively, with direct vision[294]."

Emerging from his retreat, he settled in his hometown, Shiraz, where the governor of Fars, Allahverdi Khan, had built a large *madrasa* for the Shaykh. The teaching he gave there allows us to speak of the 'School of Shîrâz' just as we had previously spoken of the 'School of Isfahan ' [295] . Mulla Sadra died in Basra in 1640 upon his return from his seventh pilgrimage to Mecca.

The body of work he left behind is monumental. It was published almost in its entirety in Iran, in lithographed editions, in the 19th century, during the Qajar period[296] .

Mollâ Sadrâ wrote a marginal commentary on Avicenna's *Metaphysics of *the *Shifâ'**. He also commented on Sohrawardî's seminal work, *The *Book of Eastern Theosophy**. He commented on 'Book of Sources' (*al-Osûl mina'l-kâfi*) by Kolaynî, one of the four fundamental books of Twelver Shi'ism compiling the teachings of the Imams. He wrote a *Tafsîr* on large sections of the Qur'an, in which he attempts, with his customary insight, to penetrate the hidden and gnostic meaning of the Holy Book. His masterpiece, however, remains the 'Four Spiritual Journeys' (*Kitâb al-Asfâr al-arba'a al-'aqlîya*). "It is a monumental work which, in the old lithographed edition, comprises no fewer than a thousand *folio* pages (…). Taken together, they form an imposing body of work, beginning with two of the most famous immediate disciples, who were the sons-in-law of Mulla Sadra: Mohsen Fayz and Abdorrazzaq Lahiji. It extends from generation to generation right up to the present day, passing through the last century via 'Abdollah Zonûzî and his son Mollâ 'Alî Zonûzî, Mollâ Hâdî Sabzavârî and so many others! It is the whole of Iranian philosophy spanning more than three centuries that we see taking shape[297] ."

The scope of Molla Sadra's work, his profound knowledge of gnosis and philosophy, clearly demonstrate the great synthesis that his doctrine was to achieve. Molla Sadra was an Avicennian, but an *Ishraqi* Avicennian, which means that he bridged the gap between Avicenna and Sohrawardi[298] . He had a profound understanding of Sohrawardî's work and felt he was completing it by strengthening its foundations and developing its implications and consequences, where Sohrawardî had lacked the time to do so[299] .

He was deeply influenced by the speculative gnosis of Ibn 'Arabî, with whom he was thoroughly familiar and whom he frequently quoted. Yet he remained, above all, a Shī'ite thinker, steeped in the teachings of the Imāms, hence the importance he attached to *the corpus* of the Imāms' *hadīths*, which he commented upon with such fervour. For it is indeed this tradition which, by nourishing and stimulating the speculative meditation of the Shī'ites, enabled the great philosophical renaissance to flourish in Iran in the 16th century, a renaissance which remained 'unparalleled elsewhere in Islam300'. Mollâ Sadrâ's prodigious synthesis thus demonstrates at work the activity of a creative thought "through which, as such, tradition recreates itself in the presen t[301] ".

Mollâ Sadrâ thus belongs to the lineage of *the Ishrâqîyûn* (the Persian Platonists), yet this in no way prevents him from bringing about a genuine 'revolution' in the metaphysics of Being. Using powerful dialectical methods and a masterful knowledge of all the classical texts, he establishes a metaphysics of Being that gives the act of being precedence over essence. The idea of *istihzâr* (making present), already expounded by Sohrawardî as the state of separation from matter (*tajarrod*), takes on, in his thought, the primacy of Being over the metaphysics of essences. This is because the act of being is capable of intensification and weakening. It is the act of being that already determines what constitutes an essence. This results in a perspective in which the intensifications of being encompass all degrees of existence. The metaphysics of existence ultimately leads to a metaphysics of *Presence,* which is also a testimony. The more being is present to itself, the more it separates itself from the limiting conditions of this world, the more it makes up for the lag behind Total Presence, the further it moves away from that which conditions absence. 'The more intense the degree of Presence, the more intense the act of existing, and therefore also the more this existence exists beyond death.'

From all this arise the major themes of Sadrian metaphysics: 1) the primacy of the act of existing over quiddity; 2) the theory of substantial, or rather transsubstantial, movement; 3) the unification of the subject that understands with the understood form; 4) the theory of the imagination as a purely spiritual faculty, independent of the physical organism, that is to say, the theory of *the imaginal* or the *mundus imaginalis*; 5) the philosophy of resurrection, which depicts the Gnostic history of the soul, with the threefold growth of man across the three levels of the world of sensible phenomena, the soul and the Spirit.

CHAPTER VII
Priority of existence

The metaphysics of Being formulated by Mulla Sadra is 'revolutionary' in the sense that it completely overturns the metaphysics of essences inherited from al-Farabi and Avicenna. The ontology of the Peripatetics held that an essence is immutable; that is to say, an essence or quiddity (*mâhîyat*) is what it is, without its being necessarily implying its existence; the latter is an attribute superimposed upon the essence: in other words, existence is a predicate of quiddity. Mollâ Sadrâ reverses this perspective. Now it is quiddity that is the predicate of existence, since it is by existing that being is what it is. In the metaphysics of essences, being is not existence but merely the copula of the logical judgement, hence the divorce between thought and being. Thought thus isolates the two partners and, depending on whether it favours the priority of one or the other, comes to conclude that one is the qualification of the other[302]. In contrast, the metaphysics of Mulla Sadra, by rejecting this differentiation between being and existence, scarcely admits that there can be a being that does not exist, for that would be contradictory to the very notion of being. There is a *sui generis* union between quiddity and essence. 'The act of existing *is* quiddity itself existing, not something it *possesses* or which is superimposed upon it. In short, the concept of being is the very concept of its realisation, of effective essencification (*tahaqqoq*), of actualisation determined either in concrete individuals (*fî'l-a'yân, in singularibus*) or in thoughts. "[303] Such is the case with Being, like light which precedes and outstrips any possible representation and which cannot be defined by anything that is brighter.

Sohrawardî, for example, had also espoused a metaphysics of essences; however, his 'Eastern' philosophy, which employed the concept of *Xvarnah*, posited the mobility of being due to the intensification and attenuation of the ascending lights from East to East. On the other hand, the notion *of istihzâr*, 'making present', implied the idea of presence at other levels of Being. This is why it can be said of it that it is a metaphysics of Presence which does not yet dare to assert its name. Mollâ Sadrâ had the deep conviction that he was completing Sohrawardî's work, just as the latter had felt, no less deeply, that he was taking up the mantle of Avicenna's Eastern philosophy. "Mollâ Sadrâ is aware that he is adding to the edifice what was missing, and this is why the link between Sohrawardî and Mollâ Sadrâ is a major moment in the philosophical history of Ir n[304] ."

Thus, this act of being can be situated at every level of the scale of being, from mental existence (*wojûd dhihnî*) to sensible, imaginal and intelligible existences. It follows that all beings participate together in this reality of being; they are associated with it through a participation in the very content of the concept (*ishtirâk ma'nawî*), not through a mere verbal or homonymous participation (*ishtirâk lafzî*)[305] . This spiritual communion (*ishtirâk ma'nawî*) thus makes it possible to encompass the totality of existence, including the First Being, within a single participation: the unity of being (*wahdat al-wojûd*). It follows that, unlike the metaphysics of essences, an essence, depending on its modes or acts of being, far from being fixed and immutable, even experiences moments of intensification and moments of weakening. Mollâ Sadrâ's universe is a world in which essences undergo continual metamorphoses, such that the scale of these transformations is practically unlimited. Movement is thus introduced even into the very category of substance, and this gives rise at all levels of existence to an 'intrasubstantial movement' (*harakat jawharîya*). One can speak, in Mollâ

Sadrâ of ‘a mobility, a *restlessness of being*, which spreads from one end of the scale of beings to the other, and hence of the capacity of an essence to undergo a cycle of metamorphoses, the stages of which mark so many planes of the univers s[306] ’.

In the metaphysics of essences, the status of man, for example, is constant. For the
In Mollâ Sadrâ’s metaphysics, which is primarily existential, a being such as man encompasses a multitude of stages, ranging from ‘those of demons with human faces to the sublime state of the Perfect Man’[307]. The body thus passes through a multitude of states, ranging from the material and perishable body to the archetypal body, and even to the divine body (*jism ilâhî*). Consequently, a single essence is capable of passing through infinite degrees of intensification and degradation: souls may be more or less soul-like, men more or less man-like; the classical definition of man as a rational animal is by no means a fixed idea, set in stone to the extent of being valid for every human being, for the intrasubstantial movement carries these essences up and down the infinite scale of Being. This is why Sadrâ’s metaphysics necessitates the existence of interworlds, intermediate links capable of ensuring the continual upward and downward flow of metamorphoses. Hence also the existence of Platonic Ideas, or that of the *imaginal* world, which allow for the differentiation of essences passing through three principal modes of existence: material existence, imaginal existence, intelligible existence. Hence also the idea of mental existence (*wojûd dhihnî*), true existence at the level of thought, since an essence, being from the outset an act of existence, exists truly either at the level of thought or concretely at the level of the sensible. This thesis reverses any separation between thought and being and excludes any division setting being against existence[308].

All essences undergo intensifications and degradations, variations,
mutations, metamorphoses (*tahawwol*) with the exception of the ‘primordial Divine Existence, which, as Sadrâ says, possesses no quiddity, because it is the act of being in its purest form, of which one cannot conceive a more complete, more intense or more perfect form t[309] ’. Mollâ Sadrâ rejects both Peripatetic metaphysics, which makes being a predicate of essence, and the view of a certain form of Sufism that tends to regard ‘every individualised quiddity as merely an accident of the One Existence ’ [310].

However, this thesis (according to which there are no immutable essences, but each essence is determined according to the degree of intensity of its act of being) calls for another: that of transsubstantial or intrasubstantial movement, which introduces mutation and variation right down to the very core of substance and makes the entire universe a Return to Being. Corbin summarises the ultimate foundation of Sadrâ’s philosophy as follows: ‘Mollâ Sadrâ is the philosopher of metamorphoses, of transsubstantiations. His anthropology is in perfect accord with what Shi’ite eschatology posits, expressed in the expectation of the parousia of the$^{\text{Twelfth}}$Imam as the advent of the Perfect Man. This anthropology is itself linked to a grandiose cosmogony and psychology: the fall of the Soul into the abyss of abysses; its slow ascent, step by step, to the human form, which is its point of emergence on the threshold of *the Malakût.…*; the extension of anthropology into a physics and metaphysics of resurrection. The concept of matter will be neither that of materialism nor that of spiritualism. Matter passes through an infinity of states: there is a subtle, spiritual (*mâdda rûhânîya*), even divine, matter. On this point, Sadrâ is in profound agreement with the Cambridge Platonists, as well as with F.C. Œtinger (*Geistleiblichkeit)*[311] . ”

CHAPTER VIII
Intrasubstantial Movement

Sadrâ, referring to the restlessness of being which runs like an immense shudder through the entire spectrum of existence, says: 'For the Divine Imperative first operates by descending from Heaven to Earth. It then brings about the ascent back towards itself, causing minerals to come into being through the balanced mixture of the Elements, then plants arise from the purest substance of these Elements, then animals, and finally man. And when man attains the fullness of his being through knowledge and perfection, he attains the degree of *active Intelligence*. There ends the gradation of the degrees of Good and Emanation: the final point of the cycle of Being has rejoined the starting point l[312] ".

The fall of the soul to *Ultimate Matter* (pure receptivity)[313] is countered by an immense surge of being which, rising from the inorganic depths, ascends gradually until the emergence of the human form, that is to say, the reign of man. From there, crossing the threshold of death, it reaches the *Malakût*, then a third spiritual growth will mark the soul's posthumous destiny and its ascent into the Interworlds. The mobility of Mulla Sadra's universe is not that of 'a world in *evolution*, but that of a world in *ascent*. The vertical orientation of this world, in a Gothic style, one might say, corresponds to the idea of Mabdâ' and *Ma'âd*, the Origin and the Return, through which *meta-history* bursts into our worl e[314] ».

The idea of this intrasubstantial movement (*harakat jawharîya*) is integral to the metaphysics of Sadrâ's Being. From the moment there is no essence in itself, but each essence is determined by the act of being and varies according to the intensity or weakening of existence, the impulse of Return takes hold at all levels of being; and the once immutable essences yearn for the metamorphoses of infinite restlessness. The body, for example, is not limited solely to its concrete existence on the sensible plane. It must be considered from the Element, which is a qualitative state, through to the successive metamorphoses that lead it in turn from the mineral state to the vegetable state, then to the animal state, and finally to the state of the speaking body, capable of perceiving spiritual realities. Matter itself is not to be confused with sensible materiality; it passes through an infinity of states: it is a gross body, then a subtle body in the Interworlds, and finally a divine and spiritual body. The human soul, too, now has a *history*, but not a history directed in the horizontal sense of a progressive becoming, but a 'metaphysical history' from its pre-existence to its fall into the abyss of abysses and its ascent to attain the 'hominal state'. From this state, the soul, passing successively through the 'minor resurrections' in death and the 'major resurrection' in birth into *the otherworld*, finally attains the plane of being that is that of the spiritual man, 'so that, says Sadrâ, the Souls accomplish their return to God the Most Generous'[315].

In this Ascent lies the idea of *the Mi'râj* of the soul, its ascent from the depths of the mineral realm to the human form. A true ascent from the Underworld, which is the story of the soul's metamorphoses, until it reaches the world of human reality (*'âlam al-insânîya*), the "human realm " [316] .

Furthermore, one must not confuse the idea of the Return—which is precisely what the intrasubstantial movement implies—with the concept of *tanâsokh* or metempsychosis. The resurrection body (*jism okhrawî*) is a body that the soul has fashioned for itself; it is, in a sense, a body

acquired (*moktasab*) as a result of one's actions, behaviour, and habits—whether good or bad. It stands in 'the same relationship to the soul as a shadow does to that which casts it e[317]'. One must not, therefore, conceive of this *return* or this transsubstantial movement as a 'local and material transfer', as if the soul were separating from one body to take on another (as is the case in reincarnation), but rather as the passage from one mode of being to another mode of being. Since the transfer is a 'transfer in substance' (*intiqâl jawharî*), which also implies the idea of metamorphosis. 'One must conceive,' says Corbin, 'of a continuous process of renewal (*ittisâl tajaddodî*), a continuous succession of metamorphoses of being (*akwân ittisâlîya*). One might say that the authentic concept of *ma'âd* replaces the idea of transmigration with that of transubstantiation, and the idea of metensomatosis (*tanâsokh*) with that of metamorphosis. Whilst the idea of a transvasement or 'local transfer' of the soul entails insurmountable difficulties, on the other hand the progression from imperfection to perfection, from lesser intensity to increasing intensity, from this world to another world, not only presents no impossibility, but is indeed the idea of a proven truth (*mohaqqaq*). It is the very idea of this ascent of the human being, step by step, world by world[318] ."

This is also why the 'acquired body', which is subtle, has an autonomous existence, independent of the material body that carries it; by virtue of accumulated latent powers, such as behaviours and acquired habits (*malikât*), it may conform to or be in affinity with (*monâsabat fî'l-bâtin*) one of the four categories of being: the angel, the demon, the animal, or the ferocious beast. It is therefore up to the soul either to attain angelic status in action or to fall short of its own potential. Thus,

'superhumanity of the prophets and Imams' is, in relation to this human nature, what the latter is in relation to the animal[319] .

CHAPTER IX
Unification of the intellecting subject with the intelliged form

Mollâ Sadrâ states: 'It is therefore established that man has: 1) an existence within material Nature (*physis*), and in this respect, he is neither an object of intellect nor even an object of sensory perception; 2) an existence in the *sensus communis* (*hiss moshtarik*, in Greek *koinêstherion*) and the imagination, and in this respect he is an object of sensory perception (the imagination thus appears here as the transcendent condition rendering all sensory perception possible); 3) an existence in the Intellect, and in this respect it is an object of intellect (*ma'qûl*) (…) Well then! Man also has a substantial 'imaginative' existence (*wojûd mithâlî*), subsisting by itself in the world of 'suspended' Images (that is to say, not immanent to a substrate), just as he has a substantial intelligible archetype (*mithâl 'aqlî*), existing of its own accord, in the world of Intelligences. The same holds true for every physical entity amongst physical entities. This entity has a threefold existence: 1) intelligible (*'aqlî*), 2) imaginal (*mithâlî*), 3) material (*mâddî*)[320] . »

This concept is also linked to substantial movement. Man attains the perfection of the imaginal world and the intelligible world only to the extent that he rises, so to speak, ontologically to the level of presence that corresponds to him, and after having undergone the metamorphoses that predispose him to it. The degree of knowledge is thus a function of the degree of being: there is perfect conformity between the *modes of intelligence* and the *modes of being* that correspond to them. There would be no conflict or duality between the subject that understands and the understood form if we were to regard the human soul as, from the outset, a substance that is separate in actuality, possessing its intellect in potentiality. Yet this is not the case, for the human soul is far from enjoying such a privilege from the outset; it must earn it. It must undergo metamorphoses in order to attain its full status as a human soul, so that its mode of being may be in accordance with the object it comprehends. For when the soul receives the intellective forms, these metamorphose it, and it is because it metamorphoses itself that the cognitive union with the level attained is comprehended. In other words, it is just as true to say that, in the soul it transforms, the intelliged Form intelliges itself, as it is to say that it is the soul itself that is the Form intelliging itself[321] . Hence, the metamorphoses undergone by the soul tell, in a sense, its *story*. 'A story which, according to the ambivalence of the word *hikâyat* (see Book IV), is an imitation, a reproduction, a re-citatio n [322].'

The soul, in the 'story' of its transformations, its metamorphoses, its ascent, recounts the 'story' of the very forms it embraces within itself, just as these forms reproduce the history of which the soul is itself the narrative. 'It does not seem to us an exaggeration to say that Mulla Sadra thus rigorously founded an authentic phenomenology of consciousness, destined to elevate it into a phenomenology of the Holy Spirit, who is the active Intellect with which the soul unites in its act of intellect. And for an *Ishrâqî* philosopher or theosophist, these are the premises that must guide his mystical experience[323]. ' Indeed, in every act of intellect, whether at the level of the sensible, the imaginal or the spiritual, it is always the same divine subject that intellects itself. The intelligible in act (*ma'qûl*) can only exist as intelligible in act. Its being in itself is identical to its state of intelligibility (*ma'qûliyat*), whether it is faced with

whether or not he is a thinking subject. He is therefore both the thinking subject (*'aqîl*) and the object of thought (*ma'qûl*). A person who has reached the level of the imaginal or the intelligible allows himself to be understood by the soul or the Active Intellect in proportion to the level of presence attained; he allows the history of his own acts of thought *to be recounted to him.* That is to say, the unification of the understanding subject and the understood form is subject to the law of unity that governs the three modes of existence: the sensible mode, the imaginal mode and the intelligible mode.

But the state of this unitive union (*ittihâd*) is attained only after a long process of learning and an inner metamorphosis, and there are multitudes of human beings who never achieve anything even remotely resembling it. Moreover, Sadrâ states that at the outset of its union with the body, the soul is itself matter; it must gradually achieve its separation from matter, its immaterialisation (*tajarrod*), and its capacity to reach the threshold of *the Malakût*, to become, in a sense, an angelic being (*malakûtî*). In other words, the soul must ascend from one degree of intellect to the next in order to finally reach the level of unification with the Active Intellect – the Holy Spirit.

It is through intrasubstantial movement that the soul ascends to the immateriality of the imaginal world (*tajarrod barzakhî*) and to that of the intelligible world (*tajarrod 'aqlî*)[324]. For it is the very condition of the soul to perceive the totality of the realities of the intelligible world and to unite with them; it is also its condition to 'become itself its own intelligible world (*'alâm 'aqlî*), a world in which the form of every intelligible being and the mental image of every material being exist. Thus, Corbin concludes, a phenomenology opens up—not of the Spirit in the abstract, but of the Holy Spirit—an autobiographical hierohistory of the one whom the *Ishrâqîyûn* call the Archangel of humanity, the Lord of the human species (*Rabb al-naw' al-insânî*), a purely visionary inner history, of which our external events are but symbols, something like an autobiography of an archangel e[325] ".

CHAPTER X
The Imaginal and the World of the Soul

"Know," says Sadrâ, "that a single quiddity has *three modes of existence*, some of which are stronger or more intense than the others. (…) Then there is another world, intermediate between the two preceding worlds (the intelligible and the material), a world which the soul creates and establishes because it is *the Image* of the Creator, in terms of its essence, attributes and operations. This world is that 'realm of the Soul' (…), a world containing the images of substances and accidents, both immaterial and material, or rather, these substances and accidents in their *imaginal* state or mode of being. The existence of the forms of things for the soul, their manifestation in a manner that does not reveal their external sensible effects—this is what is called *mental existence* and *imaginal epiphany* (*wojûd dhihnî wa-zohûr mithâlî*)[326] . »

Just as it is difficult for a metaphysics of essence to account for the intermediate existence of a world between the intelligible and the sensible, so too is it easy for a metaphysics—whose modes of existence vary according to the intensifications and degradations of being—to uphold the autonomous ontological existence of a world of the in-between. Sadrâ calls this world
'mental existence' (*wojûd dhihnî*), but an existence that is synonymous with the very creativity of the soul. Indeed, the human soul actualises its own world, and this is the *mundus imaginalis* (*'âlam al-mithâl*), situated between the intelligible and the sensible. The idea of mental existence is itself inseparable from the intermediate state of the soul's creativity, indeed from *the imaginal*. Thus, for example, there are possible things that have no material existence, such as the mythical bird *Sîmorgh*. It is therefore impossible to refer to them without presupposing the presence of a mental world in which they would have a fully-fledged existence. The consequences of this intermediate world are enormous, both in terms of resurrection—to which we shall return shortly—and in terms of the vertical flow of intrasubstantial movement. For *the imaginal* is precisely what bridges the gap between the sensible and the intelligible on the scale of Being. It is, moreover, because they failed to recognise the existence of this autonomous world that theologians and philosophers such as Ghazâlî and Avicenna failed in their endeavour to formulate a 'philosophy of resurrection'. For, as Sadrâ says, they lacked precisely the ontology of the Interworld, and it was this that prevented them from integrating the Qur'an into philosophy. Of course, Sohrawardî was the first to establish its philosophical framework, but the fact remains that they had difficulty conceiving what a body of resurrection truly is.

1) Let us begin by noting that, for Mulla Sadra, the Imagination is a spiritual faculty that does not perish with the physical body; it is like the 'subtle body of the soul'. In other words, it possesses greater existential reality (*mawjûdîyat*) than external entities. It is not possible to perceive it with the physical eye or with our impure senses s[327]. In this way, Mulla Sadra and all the *Ishraqiun* easily overcome the dualism which, in the West, pits spirit against matter. The posthumous destiny of the soul therefore entails the necessity of a 'spiritual matter', the concept of which dates back to the Neoplatonist Proclus and the Neo-Empedoclean tradition known in Islam. But this idea is also akin to the *spissitudo spiritualis* of the Cambridge Platonists.

Where the status of *the imaginal* is not recognised in its own right, where *the imaginal* has no right
In the city, imagination is conflated with the unreal and fantasy. 'There is no longer any room for the world

of forms and figures that are both spiritual and concrete, because, between abstract thought without form or figure and the expanse of the sensible material world, there remains only this imaginary e[328] . ” This is why Sohrawardî, who is the true founder of the ontology of the world of Images (*supra*, Book I, 4), considers that the imagination is situated in an in-between: between the Intellect and the estimative faculty (*wahm*). When it is the Intellect that guides it, the active imagination becomes meditative and cogitative. Conversely, when the estimative faculty intrudes upon it, it transforms into demons, into delusional fantasies; it becomes the *imaginary* pure and simple. To recognise the autonomy of this world is also to recognise its own *noetic* function, which will play an essential role in the actualisation of the potential forms of the ‘subtle body’ at the time of the resurrection.

2) It follows that the *imaginal* world is absolutely necessary to prevent a gap in the hierarchy of being. It thus serves as a ‘transmission belt’ between the sensible and the intelligible. It is therefore situated in a dual interworld (*barzakh*), both at the level of the ‘arc of Descent’ (*nozûl*), which ontologically precedes the world of phenomena, and at the level of the ‘arc of Ascension’, where it reveals the symbolic *Forms* of the acquired subtle body. And at this level of the arc of Return, *the* post-mortem *interworld* is ontologically posterior to the sensible world, since it marks, so to speak, the threshold of the *Resurrection*. Thus, at the level of the Descent, *the Imaginal* represents the world of Archetypal Images, and at the level of the Return, the *post-mortem* world of the actualised Forms of the soul, which is, moreover, parallel to it and enjoys the same status of being. Hence the paramount importance of this intermediate world for the *philosophy of the Resurrection*, itself deduced from the intra-substantial movement by virtue of which the entire universe is a sort *of workshop for producing bodies separated from matter*; indeed, immaterial bodies.

3) But the ‘imaginal’ is also a ‘spiritual substance’ (*mâddat rûhânîya*); it is the subtle envelope of the soul and the dream-like substance of which the colours, voices and musical sounds perceived in dreams are composed. And this question falls not within the realm of psychology, but of metaphysics. For these subtle phenomena all belong to the realm of a world that has its own laws, its own space, time and causality; a world of ‘immaterial thought’ (*tajarrod khayâl*) that is ontologically more real, more true than the world of sensible phenomena. It is by virtue of this immateriality, too, that the Images of the imaginal world are called ‘Images in Suspension’, that is to say, without a substrate to which they might be immanent. Yet they are not to be identified with Platonic Ideas (*mothol afltâtûnîya*), but represent an intermediate degree between the Ideas and the sensible world. And it is through this mediating world that the individuation of beings takes place prior to their arrival in the material world. ‘It is the soul (the Form) that is the principle of individuation,’ says Sadrâ[329]. It is ‘pure form’ and, as Form, it is also a substance separate and independent of the matter of the physical body (*jawhar mojarrad ’an mâddat al-badan*)[330]. And since these ‘imaginative Forms’ subsist in the manner in which a thing subsists through its active agent (*fâ’il*) and not in the manner in which a thing would persist through its passive receptacle (*qâlib*), Imagination is therefore essentially an *active Imagination.*

4) This active imagination will give the soul a power of creativity, of configuration (*taswîr*) and typification (*tamthîl*). ‘When all the faculties of the soul have thus become as though they were a single faculty, which is the power to configure and typify (…) ; its imagination has itself become sensory perception; its imaginative sight (*basar khayâlî*) is itself its sensory sight (*basar hissî*). Likewise, its hearing, its sense of smell, its taste, its touch—all these *imaginative senses* are themselves sensory faculties. For whilst *externally* there are five sensory faculties, each with its own organ located in the body, *internally* they all constitute a single *synaesthesia* (*hiss moshtarak*, *sensus* communis) [331].”

Corbin demonstrates this idea of the transfiguration of the senses in relation to the creative faculty of the soul

We can already see echoes of this in the works of Rûzbehân and Sohrawardî, for whom the Persian term *dîdeh-ye andarûnî* (inner vision) carries the same meaning and refers to the same phenomenon. But in Sadrâ, this power of the soul to shape reality will also play an important role in eschatology, since the latter has been oriented from the outset towards the doctrine of the imagination. And Sadrâ, commenting on this statement by Sohrawardî: 'Souls have the power to bring Images into existence', adds: "Whoever has understood this theme as required by an understanding of its true meaning will be able to establish the thesis of bodily resurrection (*ma'âd jismânî*)[332]."

Thus, Sadrâ concludes, "all external sensory faculties are shadows and vestiges of these internal faculties, all of which return to the essential centre of the soul, to the soul itself " [333] .

5) But this creativity of the soul ensures that it has the faculty to anticipate visions eschatological. 'The soul,' says Sadrâ, 'imagines itself in a form that corresponds to it, and encounters the things promised in a manner consistent with the faith it professed (…). Hence the Prophet said: the grave is either a garden amongst the gardens of Paradise, or a pit of Hell[334]. ' The vision of the hereafter may take place either in this very existence or after death (minor resurrection). In any case, the principle – whether in this world or in the hereafter – is the same: the soul reproduces and configures its world. Yet, 'the things of the otherworld,' says Sadrâ, 'have a stronger mode of being and a more intense efficacy, because they are of a more perfect simplicity and are in no way dispersed among material things. They are like the kernel; the things of this world are like the husk or the bark. (…) in the case of things existing in the otherworld, their concrete existence is identical to their existence as representation and perception (*wojûd sûri idrâkî*). The greater the delight they provide, the more intense the suffering they inflict t[335] ".

As long as the soul remains in the physical body of this world, it is like 'the embryo in the womb'. Through death in this world, it is born into the next; it thus finds itself in the *barzakh*, which is its 'cradle'. The subtle body that the soul carries with it on its posthumous journey is none other than its *imaginal body* (*jism mithâlî*), or the acquired body (*jism moktasab*); it is this body that must reach maturity. "This is why only the doctrine of the Active Imagination—substantial and substantiating the body that the soul constitutes for itself—allows one to fully grasp the meaning of *ma'âd jismânî* or 'bodily' resurrection[336]."

CHAPTER XI
The Three Resurrections

1) A philosophy of presence as testimony

Mollâ Sadrâ's metaphysics of Being culminates in a metaphysics of Presence which, as it also entails a metaphysics of witnessing, marks the pinnacle of prophetic philosophy. But 'from this very summit,' says Corbin, 'one can discern the line which, leading to a metaphysics of active imagination and the *imaginal*, culminates in a metaphysics of the Resurrectio n[337]'. These are thus synonymous *terms* that convey the different nuances of a single reality: the intensity of being (*wojûd*), the notion of presence (*hozûr*) and witness (*shohûd)*; and all of this is related to the *ma'âd*, the resurrection or *being-beyond-death*.

When Mulla Sadra asserts that the degree of existence is proportional to the degree of presence, this means that the more intense a being is, the more it is a Presence to other worlds, and the less it is an absence in the face of death.

"The more human existence is Presence, the more the human being is the Witness of other worlds, the less their being is a being for death" and the more it is a being *for beyond death*. The metaphysics of Presence expands into a metaphysics of vision and testimonial presence (*shohûd*), itself heralded by imâmology and realised through the internalisation of the latter[338]."

Because Mollâ Sadrâ's metaphysics is a metaphysics that gives priority to the act of being (to the imperative realm of the Instauration); because it is thereby protected against any 'agnostic reflex' seeking to divert it from its vertical ascent towards Being, and because it is also, already, a philosophy of resurrection (being for beyond death), it is an 'engaged' presence. But a committed Presence, *hic et nunc*, beyond and above death, for a posthumous becoming[339]. This commitment prevents the soul from falling into the traps of history, because there is no real commitment except towards the dimension of metahistory. "A being can only assume this commitment if its 'polar dimension' is revealed to it, which *eo ipso* already makes its act of existing an act of presence in the worlds beyond death t [340] . " For the being does not emerge from a prior state of nothingness as in modern existential philosophy, but is deeply rooted in the eternal pre-existence of the Spirits prior to the fall into the abyss of abysses. Hence the meaning of presence, which consists precisely in separating oneself from the conditions of this world, in making up, as it were, for the *delay* (*ta'akhkhor*) in achieving total presence, for this delay is not nothingness; it is the veil of unconsciousness that envelops the soul. And to the extent that this being removes this veil and becomes immaterialised (*tajrîd*) in relation to the conditions of this world subject to distance, extension and time, it also separates itself from them, and the more it separates itself, the more it makes up for the delay of the Fall, the more it fills the absence of death, and the more it thereby frees itself from the conditions of being-for-death. The entire philosophy of Resurrection by Mulla Sadra serves only to articulate this fundamental intuition of the metaphysics of Being conceived as a metaphysics of Presence. In relation to this eschatological vision of things, we might say with Corbin that

"For a Molla Sadra, all the postulates of our philosophy, all our 'agnostic reflexes', serve no purpose other than to exacerbate a being's 'delay', forcing it to remain behind itself[341]."

But the philosophy of Presence also implies a metaphysics of witness. To be present is also to be a witness (*shâhid*). The Shia *hadiths* describe the twelve Imams as Witnesses of God.

“An eyewitness is someone who is ‘present to’, someone who has direct vision e [342]. ” Thus, every Imam has a dual function: “towards the One to whom he is present and who is present through him to others, and towards those others *for whom* that One is present *through him*, just as they are present through him to that One [343] ”.

The metaphysics of Presence blossoms into a metaphysics of the testimony of the Witnesses of God. This dual *function* of mediation, besides amplifying presence at the level of imamology and prophetic philosophy, also protects us against the dual *peril* that ever threatens monotheism and to which Corbin never tires of referring, because it constitutes, in his view, the “very paradox of monotheism ’: to preserve itself both from the rigid monotheism of the abstractionists (*ta’tîl*) and from the unconscious anthropomorphism of the polytheists (*tashbîh*). It is therefore the Imam, as *an* eyewitness, who ultimately protects us from this dual peril. Hence this maxim often repeated by the Shia: ‘He who dies without knowing his Imam dies the death of the heedless.’

If, then, the philosophy of Being is a metaphysics of presence, and this a metaphysics of Witnessing and of a presence beyond death, what is this meta-history that now enables us to extend ourselves beyond and beyond death? Here the theory of the three resurrections and the triple growth of the spiritual man comes into play.

2) The threefold growth and the posthumous becoming of the soul

‘When one dies, one’s resurrection has already begun’ (*idhâ mâta faqad qâmat qîyamatoh*), say the mystical texts of Islam. In the gnosis of Sufism, for example, the cessation of the effusion of being (*ta’tîl-e fayz* – Persian) is inconceivable; that is to say, it is impossible to conceive that the material world should cease to exist and dissolve entirely into the indistinctness of cosmic concealment, in the Indian manner of the Night of Brahman. The merciful flow of creation does not cease for a moment, and the movement of beings to rejoin the names of which they are the epiphanies never runs dry. On the one hand, along the arc of the Descent, are arranged the hierarchical degrees of being, each higher degree being the initial and final cause of the degree immediately below it; on the other hand, we have the arc of the Ascension, through which the upward movement of beings travels the reverse path of the descent. The mineral finds its perfection, that is to say its final cause, in the plant; the plant in the animal; the animal in man; and man finds his perfection in the state of the Perfect Man, which is the final stage of perfection, at the end of which man participates in his great resurrection and the cycle of being is completed. According to Sadrâ, the genesis of man, from his embryonic state to the full development of his intellectual faculties, is marked by three resurrections. The movement of beings, from the mineral realm to the threshold of death—which is the transition to fixation, to the state of immaterialisation (*tajarrod*)—is an intrasubstantial movement at the end of which the material perfection of beings is completed. Shaykh Mohammad Tabâtabâ’î compares the substantial movement of beings to the potter’s wheel, which, having completed a pot, sets it aside, yet the rotation of the wheel does not cease. The objects and pots set aside symbolise beings who have crossed the threshold of death. First, the human being born into this world is resurrected into the sensible world; this is the birth of the sensible human being. A second time, by departing from this physical world, he is resurrected into the interworld of the Soul; this is called the ‘minor resurrection’ (*qîyamat soghrâ*). In relation to the soul’s future metamorphoses, this is merely the ‘time of the cradle’. A third time, the resurrection takes place on an even higher plane, which is the ‘major resurrection’, that is to say, the passage of the Soul into the world of the Intelligences or, as Corbin so aptly puts it, ‘the growth of the psychic or psychospiritual man into a pneumatic or spiritual man ’[344].

As for this perpetual ascent of humankind, which is also its threefold growth, Sadrâ says: ‘We have already explained to you that the structure of *existence* has been unfolded by God across three levels: as this world (*donyâ*), as the intermediate world (*barzakh*), and as the hereafter (*âkhira*). In relation to this world, He created the material body; in relation to the intermediate world, He created the Soul; in relation to the hereafter, He created the Spirit or the Intellect. And He established three intermediaries who effect the transition to each of these worlds: there is the Angel of Death; there is the blast of the Trumpet heralding ‘the Final Hour’; there is “the blast of the Trumpet with its dazzling radiance” (39:68). Death concerns material bodies; the Trumpet sounding the final hour concerns Souls; the Trumpet with its dazzling radiance concerns Spirits[345] . “Thus human nature is resurrected through physical death into the world of the Soul, and from the world of the Soul it is resurrected into the world of the Spirit. All these patterns can in fact be reduced to the structure of a triple universe, and all the triads correspond to one another. To the three worlds of the Sensible, the Imaginal and the Intelligible correspond three organs of knowledge: the senses, the imagination, the intellect. And to this triad of knowledge also corresponds the triple growth, or the triple resurrection of the world, the interworld or the otherworld. “As long as man is present in this world,” says Sadrâ, “his status is one of visibility corresponding to the nature of the material body[346]. ” Consequently, the Soul and the Spirit are hidden beneath the veil of the body. But when the soul is resurrected into the Interworld, the body disappears; that is to say, it dies through the Angel of Death (minor resurrection). In the Interworld, the Soul undergoes its second growth (*nash’at thânîya nafsânîya*). It is the Soul that is visible whilst the body is concealed. It is the Soul that serves as the subtle, acquired body (*jism moktasab*) for the Spirit. It is also the Soul that shapes its own form there, that is to say, actualises the latent forms accumulated within it, and projects them in a symbolised form in accordance with the nature of the acquired habits. The interworld thus constitutes ‘a distinct world between this world and the hereafter’[347]. It is the “Abode that endures (40:42) as the dawn endures between night and day”[348]. And this continues until the moment when “the Ultimate Hour strikes, that of the Great Upheaval (*al-Tammât al-kobrâ* [79:34])”[349].

The soul’s growth in the intermediate realm involves both a paradise and a hell. There, the soul creates its own

paradise and its own hell. The subtle impressions of the soul arising from acquired habits (*aklâq*) of ‘forms of works’, the results of actions, stored within the innermost core of the soul, are revealed at the minor resurrection in the form of symbols, clothed in figures and forms corresponding to the nature of the actions from which they proceed. This is why this *acquired body* is also an archetypal body (*jism mithâlî*), for the organ of its transubstantiation is its imaginative power.

Thus, for example, according to Shaykh Mohammad Lâhîjî, ‘the forms symbolised in the interworlds’ take the form of houris, Edenic gardens, delicious fruits and streams of honey. These symbolise merits and good deeds, whilst their opposites—that is, demerits and evil deeds—manifest as snakes, scorpions, fire, and other satanic images. The soul appears there ‘clothed in these delightful or repulsive symbols, depending on whether the fruits of the deeds reaped during earthly existence are good or evil. Love and devotion will be symbolised in the form of streams of wine; invocations and prayers in the form of bunches of grapes, apples (…). Passions in the form of dogs and snakes; (…) gluttony in the form of a wolf, and envy and covetousness in the form of scorpions[350] ”. These images correspond to the paradises and hells of the interworlds: the delightful pleasures of the saved and the unspeakable sufferings of the damned and the rejected.

Thus the Gnostics of Islam say: ‘The grave is a garden among the gardens of paradise, or, on the contrary, an abyss among the abysses of hell’. The *grave* is the grave in the true sense, not the cemetery, but the Interworld, where the soul is like a small child in its cradle u[351]. *The Interworld* situated

on the 'arc of Return' is also the *eighth climate*. But whilst on the 'arc of Descent' the "eighth climate" represents the "Eastern" world of Archetypal Images (*'âlam al-mithâl*), on the Arc of Ascent this same "climate" is symbolised by the "Western" Interworld (*post-mortem*) and consists of the symbolised forms of the residues of our actions. It is therefore the world of the events of the Soul, 'and the history of the Soul, Corbin emphasises, in relation to this world, is *meta-history*. It is the events of meta-history that the imaginative consciousness perceives. Any perception of eschatological events presupposes the meta-historical dimension[352]'

At the third stage of growth, the soul, having been resurrected in the Interworld, is reborn into the world of the Spirit and the Cherubic Intelligences. Then, says Sadrâ, begins its new growth in the Spirit (*nash'at rûhânîya 'aqlîya*). This is thus the passage from the Interworld to the world of *Haqîqat*. The dazzling flash of the first blast of Seraphiel's Trumpet strikes the souls in the Barzakh, whilst the second blast resurrects them into the world of the Spirit. 'Thus, through birth and growth in the Interworld (*barzakh*), followed by birth and growth in the Hereafter (*âkhira*), the phases of *the ma'âd jismânî*, the bodily resurrection, are fulfilled. First, upon leaving this world, the soul is resurrected into the Interworld with its subtle psycho-spiritual body (*caro spiritualis*), the one it has formed for itself through its being and its actions, and which continues to grow in the Interworld, the world of the Soul; this is the *Qiyâmal soghrâ*, the Minor Resurrection. Then, during the *Qiyâmat kobrâ*, the Major Resurrection, the body of resurrection attains the status of a mind-body. The body thus passes through the three states that Mulla Sadra describes elsewhere, states which correspond to the three degrees of human reality according to the Gnostics' conception: the carnal man, the psychic man, the spiritual man[353] ."

3) The Legacy of Mulla Sadra's Thought

Mollâ Sadrâ's thought had a most fruitful legacy. Apart from the School of Isfahan, of which he was the principal driving force, his thought remained, for most of the philosophers who came after him, the synthesis par excellence and the definitive form of philosophy in Iranian Islam; a synthesis in which the various currents of thought, such as *Ishraqi* Avicennism, Sohrawardi's Eastern theosophy, and Ibn 'Arabi's speculative gnosis, had all been integrated within the framework of Twelver Shi'ism, thus constituting the indispensable foundations of a prophetic philosophy. Indeed, Mulla Sadra's thought is more theosophical than philosophical in the strict sense of the term. And it is as 'theosophy' and gnosis, which Islamic philosophy has preserved in Iran right up to the present day. In his *Anthology of Iranian Philosophers from the 17th Century to the Present Day*, conceived in 1964 with his colleague and friend Sayyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî, Corbin was able to bring to light some twenty Islamic thinkers and demonstrate the extraordinary impact of Mulla Sadra's thought on subsequent philosophers. Unfortunately, Corbin did not have time to complete this project. However, his studies and introductions were published posthumously in a separate volume entitled *Iranian Islamic Philosophy in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, in 1981. In addition to the major philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries studied, such as Rajab 'Alî Tabrîzî (1669–70), 'Abdorrazzâq Lâhîjî (1661–62), Mollâ Shamsâ Gîlânî (17th century), Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawî 'Amilî Ispahânî (1650), Mollâ Mohsen Fayz Kashânî (1680), Qâzî Sa'îd Qommî (1691), Fâzel Hindî (1721), Mollâ 'Abdorrahîm Damâvandî (1737) and many others, Corbin also alluded, in the continuation of his *History of Islamic Philosophy* published in the Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, to the remarkable continuity of Molla Sadra's thought into the 19th century (the Tehran School during the Qajar period with Molla 'Abdollah Zonûzî (1841–42), the Khorasan School with Mulla Hadi Sabzavari, born in 1798). Indeed, all of Zonuzi's works are inspired by Sohrawardi and Mulla Sadra, as is Sabzavari's

For example, he perfectly exemplifies that category of sages whom Sohrawardî places in the highest rank: those who are masters of both speculative philosophy and spiritual experience. Like Sadrâ, Sabzavârî held to the original priority of being and existence, and carried forward the teachings of the great Master. The same is true, for example, of Shaykh Mohammad Tabâtabâ'î (d. 1981), who was an *Ishrâqî* philosopher in the Sohrawardian sense of the term. The works of Sayyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî, too, are scholarly and masterful commentaries and elucidations on the thought of Molla Sadra. All this to say that Mulla Sadra's thought had a most fruitful destiny in Iran and continues to thrive there despite difficult times. Corbin is the only Western thinker to my knowledge who not only highlighted this often-overlooked fact—that Islamic philosophy did not vanish into the sands with Averroes—but that, on the contrary, changing its register and rejecting the irreconcilable divorce between faith and knowledge, it was transformed into gnosis in Iran and culminated in the prodigious synthesis of Mulla Sadra, whose creative and enduring influence continues to inspire many *Ishraqi* thinkers, for whom philosophy is, above all, a visionary perspective on the world.

BOOK IV
From doctrinal exposition to visionary narrative

CHAPTER I
Avicenna's 'Eastern' philosophy

Whilst Averroism was to lead, in the West—as we have already seen in Book III—to the separation of faith and knowledge, of theology and philosophy, the situation was quite different in Iran, owing above all to the emergence of Sohrawardi's Theosophy of Light. Avicenna's thought, whilst harmoniously articulating angelology, cosmology, gnoseology and anthropology into a coherent whole, remained nonetheless ambiguous regarding the straightforward conjunction of philosophy and the mystical such that was to envisage it later Sohrawardî by making the 'theosophist' (*hakim mota'allih*) the prototype of one who possesses both speculative knowledge and mystical experience. Avicenna's thought, however, revealed a profoundly Gnostic dimension, a dimension which, inaugurating the cycle of visionary narratives, already facilitated the transition from doctrinal exposition to mystical fiction, making knowledge an event of the soul. It is precisely this mythopoetic space within his thought that was designated by the name 'Eastern philosophy' (*hikmat mashriqîya*).

This therefore comprises initiation narratives that blossom into a sort of angelophany (vision of the Angel) occurring between wakefulness and sleep, unfolding in dialogues during which the Angel, who is the Inner Guide, initiates his disciple into the initiatory path. This is often an inner pilgrimage associated with the symbolic elements of an initiation ritual. The core of all these narratives comprises three sequences: 1) the awakening of the soul as a stranger, exiled in this world – Western exile; 2) its encounter with the Angel who is the Guide, the soul's celestial counterpart, or, according to Avicenna, the Active Intellect; 3) the inner journey leading to *the Malakût*, and, through a shift in plane (hence the phenomena of a visionary geography), culminating in gnosis.

The essence of Avicenna's 'Eastern philosophy' is to be found, on the one hand, in what remains of his *Notes on the so-called Theology of Aristotle* (a theology which is an Arabic paraphrase of Plotinus's later *Enneads*) and, on the other hand, in the trilogy of his mystical narratives, in which Avicenna is said to have laid down 'the secret of his personal experience, thus offering the rare case of a philosopher who has attained perfect self-awareness and succeeded in shaping his own symbols, that is to say, his *Imago mundi i*[354]'.

There are three narratives that form a cycle: the *Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân*, the *Tale of the Bird*, and the *Tale of Salâmân and Absâl*.

These narratives take the form *of stages* through which the soul successively passes as, freeing itself from its bonds, it gradually emerges from its 'Western exile'. The conceptual approach of perceiving the universe in terms of intelligible essences and categories is now countered by an imaginative vision that conjures up concrete figures and symbolic persons. Once the shift in perspective—or, if you will, the reversal of relationships—is complete, the soul reveals its inner world, which now envelops the visible universe; the latter is obscured, and the invisible becomes visible. The soul unveils its secrets; it awakens to its condition as an exile and, feeling a longing to return, sets out in search of its own kind, towards a *terra incognita* beyond all known horizons and climates. It enters a world that can no longer be located by our usual coordinates. Thus rises on the horizon *the East*, which always signifies the world of Enlightenment and Intelligence, whilst *the West* symbolises the world of

Darkness refers to the sublunar realm into which souls descend.

The angel *takes* on the form of a specific, concrete person whose announcement corresponds 'to the degree of experience of the soul to whom he announces himself'[355]. The appearance of the Angel immediately raises the question of the conjunction of the Angel of Revelation of the prophets and the Active Intellect of the philosophers. In mystical accounts, the Angel becomes distinct within the soul and reveals himself as its heavenly counterpart. This reveals, at first glance, the two complementary aspects of this encounter, which is simultaneously the awakening of the soul as a stranger in this world—that is, its realisation of exile—and the emergence from within oneself. This emergence amounts to recognising the Guide as the Symbol of one's true Self. From then on, the sequences follow one another: the encounter opens up the prospect of a journey to the East, a vertical ascent towards the Origin. Hence the polar dimension of the quest. For this encounter to be possible, the exiled one must develop an aptitude for the polar dimension, that is to say, an awakening to the superconscious. The

The 'climate' to which the Angel invites us is not to be understood as any geographical climate, since it is a 'eighth climate' at the boundary where all physical coordinates are reversed. Nor does this climate extend horizontally, but vertically. Thus the East (the place of the Origin [*mabda'*] and the Return [*ma'âd*]) lies at the celestial pole, on the mystical Sinai, or even at the threshold of the hereafter. Hence the symbols inherent in every quest: fabulous cities, the stronghold of the soul, the Source of Life, the blossoming of the soul's space. The discovery of the inner self is also that of verticality and height; for the Return is an Ascent to an Origin from which one was, moreover, separated only in an illusory sense. This discovery is ultimately an Eastern form of knowledge, and not a representational one; hence an immediate Presence, in the manner in which one who knows his own Self is present to himself: that is to say, his Angel.

1) The Tale of Hayy Ibn Yaqzân

The *Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân* begins with a prologue reminiscent of certain other tales inspired by Hermeticism within Islam. It serves as an invitation and an initiation to the mystical journey, describing the stages of the journey to the East in the company of the Illuminating Angel, whose personal relationship with the philosopher is embodied in the character of Hayy ibn Yaqzân (*Vivens, filius Vigilantis* = Living One, son of the Watcher).

In his fine book on *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, Corbin reveals the full richness of symbolism in Avicennian narratives: the archetype of the Angel-Self, the meaning of individuation, and the pedagogical significance of any initiatory narrative. In short, the relationship between Avicennism, angelology and the profound link uniting this dimension of Avicenna's thought with the work of the man who was to take up the torch, namely Sohrawardî. It also demonstrates for the first time that these three *Tales* form a cycle and that whilst the *Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân* ends on the threshold of the Angel's invitation, the *Tale of the Bird* continues the journey from the East to the city where the Supreme King resides, whilst the *Tale of Salâmân and Absâl* typifies the mystical death of the soul or union with the Active Intellect, which is also a triumphant anticipation. Corbin goes further: he traces the metamorphoses of *the Tale of the Bird* through the key moments of Persian mystical poetry, from the Tale of Abû Hamîd Ghazâlî right up to 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. In this sense, this seminal work opens many secret doors which, without the aid of his profound knowledge of the symbols that have governed Iran's mythopoetic memory for centuries, would never have been brought to light.

So what is the *story of *Hayy ibn Yaqzân** about?

The hero of the tale recounts that, whilst walking one day with his companions, he met a sage: 'He

was handsome; his person shone with divine glory… one saw in him only the freshness peculiar to the young; no weakness bent his bearing, no flaw marred the grace of his stature e[356] ". When asked his name, lineage and country, he replied: "My name is *Vivens*; my lineage, *filius Vigilantis*; as for my homeland, it is the heavenly Jerusalem (lit. the 'Sacred Abode' [*al-Bayt al-Moqaddas*]). My vocation is to be ever on the move: to travel the length and breadth of the universe to the point of knowing all its conditions. My face is turned towards my father, and my father is *Vigilans*[357].'

After a long conversation, the Sage reveals to him the science of physiognomy (*'ilm-e* farâsat)[358]. This science, Corbin explains in his commentary, is that which brings to light the hidden realm of the soul, a science in which the Angels excel, since they are *interpreters* par excellence. It is therefore a matter of
'to cause the apparent, the *zâhir*, to disappear—the whole apparatus of faculties and powers and the appearances secreted by these powers that envelop the soul[359]' so that the Eastern soul, the Stranger, may appear to itself beneath the dark covering of the earthly condition. Physiognomy thus becomes an illustration of *ta'wîl*, not merely a *ta'wîl* of texts as practised by exegetes, but a *ta'wîl* of the soul. Henceforth, knowledge is perceived through the eye of the soul, through an Image that transforms everything into a symbol s[360] .

The Sage invites the pilgrim to rid himself of his two burdensome companions: the wrathful one, whom nothing can subdue, and the glutton, the lecher who licks, devours and covets everything. From then on, the irascible and concupiscent appetites are no longer conceptual abstractions but concrete characters, indeed two insatiable demons of the soul[361] .

The pilgrim then asks the Sage questions about his path, the journey to be undertaken, and asks if he may undertake this journey with him; the Sage replies:

'You and all those in a similar situation to yours cannot undertake the journey that I myself am making. It is forbidden to you; the path is closed to all of you, unless your fortunate destiny helps you by separating you from these companions. But the time for this separation has not yet come: a deadline has been set for it, which you cannot bring forward. For the time being, therefore, you must be content with a journey punctuated by stops and inactivity; at times you are on the road, at times you spend time with these companion s[362] ."

The conversation continues and the pilgrim asks him about each of the regions he has visited. The Sage explains the *threefold division* of this visionary geography: one lying between the East and the West; one beyond the West; the other beyond the East t[363] .

The East is the realm of the soul, of the rising sun. As one ascends towards the East,
One after another, as successive revelations, appear the earthly Angels, the heavenly Souls, the Cherubim Archangels, and then the King, withdrawn into his utter solitude, his beauty veiled by his own beauty. This is the *realm* of Eastern philosophy e[364] . The ascent to these high spheres of Being follows the reverse path of the procession of the ten Intelligences, as we have already seen it appear in Avicenna's cosmology and angelology (*supra*, Book II).

To gain the strength for the journey, says the Sage, one must 'plunge into the spring of water that flows in the
the vicinity of the permanent Source of Life[365] ".

At the end of the narrative, the Sage begins to describe the King as one 'who eludes the power of those skilled in bestowing titles'. He then extols His splendour and beauty: 'It would seem that His beauty is the veil of His beauty, that His Manifestation is the cause of His Concealment, that His Epiphany is the cause of His Hiddenness. (…) Sometimes certain lonely souls among mankind migrate towards Him. (…) He makes them aware of the wretchedness of the benefits of your earthly climate. And when they return from His presence, they return laden with mythical gifts. (…) Now, if you wish, follow me, come with me to Him. Pai x[366] ."

2) The Story of the Bird (Risâlat al-Tayr)[367]

The *Tale of the Bird* is the 'logical' sequel (no doubt according to the principles of Eastern logic) to the previous Tale. It offers a positive response to the Angel's invitation by setting out for the East as a companion of Hayy ibn Yaqzân. To become the Angel's companion is also to follow the same path as the Prophet during his *Mi'râj* (Ascension) in the company of the Archangel Gabriel; it is to undertake an ascent that takes place not *in the body* but in the Spirit t [368].

The Image of the Self, symbolised as a winged being, is found in Sohrawardî in the form of Gabriel's two wings, and in the form of the Simorgh, in Ghazali and Attar. This Image, which represents the totality of the pilgrim's being, *is reflected* in the soul that has become transparent as a mirror. The bird is, therefore, the celestial counterpart of our exiled being, the transcendent 'person' who guides, protects and inspires us. Its Image is the 'organ of our vision', but a vision proportionate to the mode of being[369] .

The *Tale of the Bird* responds to the invitation contained in the previous tale, but it is a response that is already a journey towards the East, that East whose splendours were already glimpsed in The Tale of the Sage. The two tales, one following on from the other, thus exemplify the same vision; they correspond to the same psychological state, to the same mental projection. There is no break between the two, as they mark the sequence of two successive acts in the Trilogy of Avicenna's Tales.

The Tale tells the story of the birds who, lured by the hunters' pleasant whistling, succumb to the charm of the surroundings and fall into the snares. 'The rings closed around our necks, the nets tangled around our wings, the ropes became entangled around our feet. Any movement we attempted only tightened our bonds further and worsened our situatio n [370].'

The birds resign themselves and, forgetting their downfall, surrender themselves, oblivious, to the constraints of their cage. But one day they see, through the mesh of the nets, a flock of birds who had freed their heads and wings from the cage and were preparing to take flight. Pieces of rope, still visible, clung to their feet. This sight reminded them of their former state. The hero of the tale began to cry out to them and asked for their help: 'Teach me by what ruse to seek deliverance[371]?' At his insistence, the birds finally replied and said: 'We have been prisoners of the same suffering as yours,' and then they let him experience the same treatment. The net falls, the wings emerge, the cage door opens and the bird regains its freedom. But the shackle remains attached to the tips of its feet and the birds can do nothing about it, since they too are suffering from it. Then begins the journey towards the two slopes of a mountain. The birds pay no heed to the temptations of the traps. They then cross six mountains in succession and arrive at the seventh. There they pause, and see lush gardens, pavilions, rushing streams, fruit and fragrances in abundance. They renounce these delights and continue their journey to reach the eighth mountain, whose summit is so high that it is lost in the sky. There they are welcomed by other birds full of kindness who listen attentively to their tale and join them with the utmost care.

Beyond this mountain lies a City where the Supreme King resides. The birds arrive at his court and await an audience. Having passed through a series of veils, they reach the King's oratory. 'When the final curtain was drawn back and the King's beauty shone before our eyes, our hearts were transfixed and we were struck with a stupor[372]…'

The King said: 'No one can untie the knot that binds your feet, save those very ones who tied it there. Behold, I am sending a Messenger to them, who will charge them with the task of satisfying you and removing the fetter from you. Go, then, happy and content[373].'

Compared to *the Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân*, the *Tale of the Bird* marks a significant transformation: the 'threshold' of inner initiation has been crossed. The Avicennian bird and the Sohrawardian exile are, too, merely 'passers-by' in this celestial world. They will have to return to everyday life. But with this one difference: they are now different. Their response to the Angel's invitation and the inner pilgrimage that followed have completely transformed their condition. The pilgrim no longer walks alone: *'Now we are on our way; we walk in the company of the King's Messenger '*[374].

3) The Metamorphoses of the Bird in Persian Mystical Poetry

According to Corbin, three key phases can be identified in the metamorphoses of the bird in Persian mystical poetry: the two works by Avicenna and Ghazâlî, and 'Attâr's great epic, **Mantiq al-Tayr** (The *Conference of the Birds*).

The Tale by Abû Hâmed Ghazâlî (d. 1111) is situated chronologically between that of Avicenna (d. 1037) and the famous work of Farîdoddîn 'Attâr (d. 1229). It appears to be relatively little known. The great theologian wrote it in Arabic and his brother Ahmad (author of a Breviary of Love) translated it into Persian. The emotional tone and the level of mystical experience are entirely different from Avicenna's Narrative. It seems that between the two Narratives, the only common denominator is the bird and the theme of the pilgrimage to the King. The final episode marking deliverance, as well as the stages of ascent from Heaven to Heaven, are composed in a different manner. There is no trace of the enthusiasm of reunion, nor of the King's courteous welcome as he sends the pilgrims home in the company of his Messenger[375]. On the contrary, the birds are terrified by the King's reception. 'It is not an encounter with the self, a face-to-face with *their* Self, but a clash with the hostile, alien Numinosum, something like a missed invitation, and the Birds are on the verge of psychosis[376] . " And whilst the birds in Avicenna's narrative rose to the royal sanctuary after a fierce and heroic struggle, those of Ghazâlî are admitted there by grace.

'Attâr's *Conference of the Birds* is quite different. The destination of the pilgrimage is the palace of the *Simorgh*. This is a mythical bird whose name already appears in the Avesta as *Saêna meregh a* [377]. In Persian poetry, it features in two traditions: that of the heroic epic and that of mystical poetry and gnosis.

Through a play on the Persian form *Sî-morgh* (thirty birds), 'Attâr discovers a means of expressing this state *of identity within difference and of difference within identity*, a paradox that constantly appears and eludes the means of expressio n[378] .

As in Avicenna's *Conte*, we find here the episode of the Birds' departure, the journey through the seven valleys of trials that mark the stages of the celestial ascent. These are the mystical valleys of seeking, desire, knowledge, independence, unity, wonder and destitution. It is only after traversing these valleys that one discovers the Palace of the Fabulous Bird. The two themes shared with Ghazâlî's Narrative are the description of the hardships endured by the birds and the initially cold reception they receive at the royal court. But 'the "threshold" of initiation that the theologian Ghazâlî cannot cross, 'Attâr *surmounts*, carried along by a mystical impulse that is inscribed in his work as a stroke of genius[379]'.

The birds set out in their thousands, travelled for many years, and many perished along the way; yet of those thousands who heeded the hoopoe's call, only a small number remain to reach the final destination. Some drown in the ocean, others perish in the sun's flames, and still others are devoured by ferocious beasts. Yet others kill one another, or stop along the way, or simply forget the reason for their quest.

Only *thirty* (= *sî*) arrive. They behold the divine Majesty, the radiance of thousands of blazing suns, and are seized by despair and stupor. Then the herald of the Majesty appears, and, seeing them in their wretched state, asks them: 'Where do you come from? Where is your home?'

Then there is an unexpected break. The birds are presented with a certain mysterious text and ordered to read it through to the end, for it is through the voice of the symbol that this text will bring the secret of their journey to their consciousness. "It is in search of his royal brother, of his celestial Self, that the pilgrim has set out[380]. " This upheaval purifies the birds' souls. "The Sun of Proximity shines upon them; enveloped in its rays, their souls are raised to that incandescence which will allow the Mystery to sh e [381] ."

At that moment, in the reflection of their faces, the *Sî-morghs* see the face of the eternal Sîmorgh. "They looked: it was indeed this Sîmorgh, without a doubt; *this* Sîmorgh was indeed *these* Sîmorg h[382] . ' They saw themselves as the totality of Sî-morgh; and Sîmorgh was the totality of Sî-morgh. And when they looked simultaneously from both sides, Sîmorgh and Sî-morgh were one and the same Sî-morgh, one and yet many.

And the Divine Majesty said: 'My Majesty, like the sun, is a Mirror. Whoever comes to
in this mirror: body and soul, soul and body, sees himself there in his entirety. Since you have come as *Sî-morgh* (thirty birds), you have appeared as *thirty* (*sî*) in this mirror… I am far superior to Sî-morgh (thirty birds), for I am the essential and eternal Sîmorgh. Lose yourselves, then, in me, so that you may find yourselves in me[383] …'

What each bird encountered at the end of its quest was the mystery of its Self: a Self that transcends its earthly and exiled self, a Self that is its total being, so close and yet so far away. The reciprocity that blossoms from this mystery can only be expressed through a symbol such as the *Sî-morgh*, that is to say, a paradoxical language – that of Meister Eckhart: 'The gaze through which I know him is the very gaze through which he knows me' … or *Talent eum vidi qualem capere potui*[384] .

The cycle of the bird comes to an end beyond cosmic space, as if beyond the bounds of logic. The
The cycle of Avicenna's Tales, too, will come to an end with a departure from this world through the mystical death of *Absâl*. With it, the final act of the Avicenna trilogy will be fulfilled.

CHAPTER II
Avicenna and Sohrawardî

It is customary in Iran to contrast the *Mashshâ'ûn*—the Peripatetics or followers of Aristotle—with the *Ishrâqîyûn*—the theosophers or Platonists. However, it is rare to find an *Ishrâqî* who is not, in some way, also an Avicennian, just as it is difficult to encounter an Avicennian who has not possessed a dimension other than strictly observant Peripateticism. It is, says Corbin, this 'perpetual interpenetration that allows us to consider concretely this notion of "Eastern philosophy" established by Sohrawardî, but already specified – to say "sketched" would be an understatement – in one of Avicenna's Treatises[385]'.

Furthermore, Sadrâ Shîrâzî refers to Sohrawardî as the leader of the School of the Easterners (*mashrîqîyûn*), Easterners who were also Platonists, whilst Sharîf Jorjânî adds that the *Ishrâqîyûn* are philosophers whose leader is Plato. Just as Fârâbî (259/872) renewed the philosophy of the Peripatetics and earned the title of *Magister secundus*, so too did Sohrawardî revive and renew the philosophy of *the Ishrâqîyûn*, that is to say, the Platonists[386].

However, the works of Avicenna and Sohrawardî share many comparable features. Alongside systematic treatises, both include short spiritual narratives that are poetic texts setting themselves apart from the strictly philosophical dimension where theoretical expositions follow one another. Sohrawardî sees himself above all as the restorer of the Wisdom of the ancient Persians, and to this end he constructs a whole genealogy whose 'eternal leaven' draws as much from the sources of Greek wisdom as from the Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*) of the ancient Persian vision.

Sohrawardî, whilst acknowledging his debt to Avicenna, believes that the latter, having been unable to access the sources of ancient Iranian wisdom, was consequently unable to carry out his project successfully. For this project, according to Sohrawardî, requires not only knowledge of the sources but also a harmony between philosophy and mystical experience.

The criticism Sohrawardî levels at Avicenna boils down to this: Avicenna did not know the *true Eastern source*; this source entails the wisdom of the Easterners, that is to say, the 'sources of the Light of Glory and the Sovereignty of Light (*yanâbî'al-Khorrah wa'l Râî*)'. The philosophy of *Ishrâq* is ultimately a philosophy of *the Xvarnah*, of the celestial blaze that once haloed the sovereign Magi of ancient Ira n [387].

There is, therefore, both continuity and a break between the two thinkers. This continuity allows It fell to Sohrawardî to take up Avicenna's work. Hence Sohrawardî's praise of him; yet, to make it clear that his account begins where that of his illustrious predecessor ends, he argues that the latter could not have had access to Eastern sources. Avicenna therefore overlooked this source, which is the innate knowledge of the ancient Magi (the *Khosrowanids*), that is to say, *theosophy* par excellence.

'There was,' says Sohrawardî, 'among the ancient Persians, a community that was guided by God; it was through Him that the eminent Sages were led, all of whom differed from the Magians (Majûsî). It is their lofty doctrine of Light—a doctrine to which the experience of Plato and his predecessors also bears witness—that I have revived in my book entitled *Eastern Theosophy* (*Hikmat al-Ishrâq*), and I had no predecessor for such a projec t[388] ."

But there is another point that sets Sohrawardî apart from the work of his predecessor, and this is the supreme experience which Sohrawardî, drawing inspiration from the Qur'anic verse (79:34), calls the 'Great Shaking'. Here is what he says about it in the Prelude to his *Account of the Western Exile*:

'When I read the "Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân", despite its admirable spiritual maxims and the profound insights it contains, I found it lacking in any illumination concerning the supreme experience known as the Great Shaking (Qur'an [79:34]), which is treasured in the Divine Books (…). This is the secret upon which the spiritual stages of the Sufis and those possessing visionary intuition are founded. There is no allusion to it in the 'Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân', except at the end of the book, where it is said: "It happens that spiritual hermits among mankind emigrate towards Him…" So I, in turn, wished to recount something of this in the form of a narrative which I have entitled *The Tale of Western Exile*, dedicated to certain of our noble brothers. As for my intention, I entrust it to God u[389] ."

It was thus the final phase of *the Tale of Hayy ibn Yaqzân* that inspired Sohrawardî to follow the reverse path of the Western exile. The last sentence of Avicenna's Tale concludes with an invitation to journey: 'If you wish, follow me to Him. ' And it is precisely to follow the Angel that Sohrawardî undertakes his *Tale of Western Exile*. However, Avicenna's *Tale of the Bird* (translated into Persian by Sohrawardî) had already begun this journey; it had responded to the Sage's initiatory intent, since the pilgrim, having reached the end of his pilgrimage, returned to his earthly condition as the King's Messenger; but despite this anticipation, Sohrawardî considers that Avicenna's narratives overlook two things: the Eastern source of all quests, and the mystical phenomenon that must necessarily emerge in any undertaking of this kind, namely the Great Upheaval.

The Great Shaking is an intensely lived mystical experience that transforms theoretical doctrine or doctrinal exposition into an event of the soul—but an event such that it can only be expressed externally through the mythopoetic language of visionary narratives. By emphasising this essential feature, Shaykh al-Ishrâq unequivocally reveals the full extent of the distance separating his 'Eastern philosophy' from that which Avicenna had sought to inaugurate before him. However, the shared experience that emerges from this is an exemplification of *ta'wîl*, which makes the narrative an *exegesis* of the soul rather than of the text. This, moreover, is also the full hermeneutic meaning of the Narrative as *Hikâyat* ('Story' and 'Initiation'). *Hayy ibn Yaqzân* and the *Narrative of Western Exile* will show us this *exegesis* as an exodus that transcends the physical cosmos and internalises its structure. As for his own exegesis of this text, Corbin clarifies his thinking:

"Our exegesis, in turn, can only reclaim the text by tracing the experience from which it originates, and which has transmuted the data of physics, psychology and cosmology into symbols[390]."

CHAPTER III
Sohrawardî
and the visionary narratives

When discussing the essential characteristics of the doctrine of *Ishrâq*, Corbin lists them as follows:

1) The desire to reconnect with the vision of Light once proposed by the ancient Sages of Zoroastrian Persia.

2) This restoration, which is also a resurrection, presupposes *eo ipso* the conjunction of two paths of philosophical and mystical knowledge within the Royal Way. It is therefore an *exegesis* of the soul and a shift in level.

3) This knowledge, because it is gnosis, implies, as *ta'wîl*, the transition from doctrinal exposition to mystical narrative, experienced as an event occurring within the soul and expressed through the medium of the Active Imagination, which is the noetic organ proper to visionary narratives. This shift is also, in Sohrawardî's work, the transition from the heroic epic to the mystical epic.

Mystical narratives project a space in which the pilgrim's mystical journey acquires its full meaning. As an event of the soul, the narrative in a sense externalises the world of the soul whilst internalising the external physical world. It is therefore a transition in which 'doctrine becomes a real event'. It is also a transfer to the East, since the pilgrim's exile, by the very fact that it is a *descent*, is already oriented towards the Return, towards the 'Eastern' Homeland.

To highlight this passage is to bring to light three facts that emerge from these texts: 1) the event as such; 2) the world in which this event takes place; 3) the organ through which this event is perceived.

On the other hand, it is impossible to speak of the event of the soul without positing an intermediate world, situated between the world of sensory perceptions and the world of pure intelligences. It is this intermediate world that Sohrawardî refers to as the *'âlam al-mithal* and which Corbin interprets as the world of the 'imaginal' (*mundus imaginalis*).

Sohrawardî's endeavour will therefore be to establish the ontological foundation of this intermediate world; for, deprived of their proper place, eschatological events and visionary narratives will be dislocated, even disoriented. This world is the 'eighth climate'. Sohrawardî coined the term *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd* in Persian to designate this proper 'place', which is indeed a place, but without a location, without a spot that can be pinpointed on our geographical maps[391] .

1) The Event as Narrative *(Hikâyat)*

The Arabo-Persian word *hikâyat* conveys both the idea *of a story* and the idea *of imitation* (the Greek *mimêsis*). Every external story merely symbolises, *imitates* and recounts an inner story, that of the soul and the world of the soul. For in fact, every *story* that takes place in this visible world is *an imitation* of events first accomplished in the soul, 'in Heaven'. This is why the *locus* of hierostory, that is to say, the acts of sacred history, is not perceptible to the senses, because their meaning refers to another world. Only spiritual hermeneutics preserves the truth of the

hikâyat, the truth of the stories in the Qur'an or the heroic epic, because it grasps their spiritual meaning at the level at which the event actually unfolds, that is to say, in its own time, the time of *meta-history*. 'Anyone who has understood this never feels the need to "demythologise" or "demystify" the narratives of the Bible and the Qur'an, because these narratives are neither history nor myth' [392].

By recounting the event, the *hikâyat* tears it away from the past, so that time becomes reversible, because the event is never concluded and only becomes a *story* to the extent that it is an event understood and experienced; the act of hermeneutics becomes an integral part of the *hikâyat*; hence the idea of tracing back, for example, every *hikâyat*, every 'story', to the meta-historical event of which it is *an imitation* and which it typifies and 'historicises'[393].

(a) The three levels of hikâyat *(narrative hermeneutics)*

Corbin identifies three levels in the hermeneutic structure of the *hikâyat*. Level A corresponds to the literal, external data; Level B corresponds to the conceptual or philosophical meaning of the narrative, which is supposed to underpin this data. But the esoteric meaning of the initiation narrative consists neither in this theoretical meaning nor in the transposition from level A to level B. To truly attain the esoteric meaning, to bring about the event within the soul, does not simply consist in substituting an esoteric meaning for the succession of the narrative's external data. 'Every time we make this substitution, we are merely creating *an allegory*[394].' For to reduce the visionary narrative to an allegory is tantamount to subjecting the symbol to a process of demythologisation. Allegory can be understood through rational exposition, since it operates on the same level of understanding as the latter. In contrast, the mystical narrative expresses precisely that which can only be expressed through the symbols perceived by the narrator. Here there is a shift in the noetic level compared to theoretical exposition. This shift in level, which is also a hermeneutic, does not consist in reducing the events of the narrative to the level of conceptual evidence, but quite the contrary: in elevating them, raising them to the level of *the Malakût*, that is to say, to the level of the soul where the events of the narrat(395) actually take place.

It is this *renewal* that Corbin refers to as Level C. For the doctrine to become truly an event in the soul, the pilgrim must awaken to the awareness of this event as something that is actually happening to him, and for which he has fully assumed responsibility. This transition to Level C takes place only as the soul undergoes its metamorphosis (the encounter with the Angel). The event becomes a personal mystical experience. Such as, for example, the individuation brought about by the encounter with the Angel, or the 'agent intelligence' of the philosophers.

Thus, reaching Level C does not mean descending from Level B to Level A. 'This is what we do,' says Corbin, 'these days, when we speak of demythologisation[396].' If we do so, however, it is because we are incapable of reaching level C. We reach that level to the extent that we ascend from level A to level B and understand the secret of that passage; that is to say, to the extent that the doctrinal exposition is transformed into a real event of the soul in the *Malakût*. As soon as this conversion takes place, one experiences this event as an experience of personal realisation. 'Read the Qur'an,' says Sohrawardî, 'as if it had been revealed solely for your own sake.'

By bringing the deeds of the heroes of ancient Persia back to the East, Sohrawardî ensures that their deeds become his own story[397]. It is this passage which marks, as we shall soon see, the shift from the heroic epic to the mystical epic.

The reciting subject, the event being recited and the hero of the narrative merge at level C of the . 'From this triad,' says Corbin, 'the mystical recitation forms a unity, a tri-unity.' Hence the significance

of injunctions such as: ‘If you *are* Khezr’ or of a triumphant exclamation such as ‘I myself *am* the Grail of Kay Khosraw’[398] .

The *hikâyat*, by virtue of also being a *ta’wîl*, has a polar dimension, and it is this ‘dimension that “breaks down the latitudinal dimension of historical consciousness[399] ” and ensures that the *hikâyat* becomes a sacred history, or even an ‘anti-history’.

But all ‘sacred history’ is eschatological. He who recites the Book creates his own Book, and reads it as if that Book had been revealed especially for him. The eschatological perspective of Sohrawardian narratives stems precisely from the application of his hermeneutics. For to understand a sacred story is ‘to trace back the truth of the “phenomenon” against the flow of time and against the mor t[400] ’. The reversal of the profane time of history into a hiero-history of the narratives of the soul does not take place in this or that specific place, but in the ‘magical’ space of *the imaginal*: between *pre-eternity* and *post-eternity*.

2) Nâ-kojâ-âbâd (the imaginal world)

The world in which the event takes place is a world where the events of the soul, mystical narratives and prophetic visions occur and have their ‘place’. For example, in *The Rustling of Gabriel’s Wings*, a figure appears who, in Avicenna’s work, was called Hayy ibn Yaqzân (the Living One, son of the Watcher) but who is referred to here as the ‘Crimson Archangel’ (’*aql-e sorkh*). To the question of the pilgrim who finds himself already on another level of being, the answer is this: ‘I come from *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*. ’ The same term reappears in another narrative, the *Vade-mecum of the Faithful of Love*. To Ya’qûb’s question as he weeps for Joseph, the same reply: ‘I come from *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*.’

This term does not appear in the Persian dictionary but was coined by Sohrawardî himself. Literally, it means the land (*âbâd*) of nowhere (*nâ-kojâ*). At first glance, this term may appear to us as the exact equivalent of the term *utopia*, which also does not appear in Greek dictionaries as it was coined by Thomas More to denote the absence of any specific location. Etymologically, Corbin believes, it would undoubtedly be correct to translate *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd* as *utopia*; yet, due to the mystical connotations evoked by the Persian term, this would be a misinterpretation. For the two worlds do not exist on the same ontological level. The word *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd* refers to a city, a place situated, as it were, ‘beyond’ the psycho-cosmic mountain of Qâ f[401] . The realm beyond Qâf cannot be located on our maps, just like the mystical cities of *Jâbalqâ*, *Jâbarsâ* and *Hûrqalyâ*. Topographically, this region begins ‘at the convex surface ’ [402] of the [Ninth]Sphere, the Sphere of Spheres, the place where one departs from the coordinates of our world to which the cardinal points refer. Having crossed that boundary, the question ‘where’ (*kojâ*) loses all meaning. Hence the name *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*. A place outside of place, a ‘place’ that is not contained within a place, within a *topos*. But to step outside of ‘where’, of the category of sensory orientation, is to leave behind the external appearances associated with it and which envelop the hidden occult realities ‘just as the almond is hidden beneath the [shell403]’.

When one crosses this threshold, a kind of *reversal* of time and space takes place: what was hidden beneath appearances is suddenly revealed, opens up and envelops what was hitherto external. The invisible becomes visible. From now on, it is the spirit that envelops and contains matter. Spiritual reality is no longer in the ‘where’. Rather, it is the ‘where’ that is within it. It is itself the ‘where’ of all things; it is therefore not itself in a place, it does not fall under the question ‘where? ’ [404] .

Thus, this place is not ‘*situated* but [situative405]’. In other words, it is the privileged space of the soul revealing itself to itself. It can only be accessed through a sudden break with

. In fact, one reverses one's gaze; rather than perceiving with the eyes of the flesh, one now sees with the eyes of the soul, as the soul reveals itself in the full blossoming of its symbols. To enter it is always an *extasis*, a fleeting shift and a change of state. Often the pilgrim realises this only with wonder or a sense of unease that gives him a strange feeling of disorientation. 'He can only describe *where* he has been; he cannot show others where the path lies' [406].

An example taken from a narrative by Sohrawardî may convey the atmosphere: here is what he says the hero of **The Rustling of Gabriel's Wings**:

'For a while, I managed to make my way out of the women's quarters and free myself from the little children's clinging hands and belts. It was a night when the jet-black darkness had taken flight beneath the azure vault (…). Suddenly I felt the urge to visit my father's *khângâh*[407]. This *khângâh* had two doors: one opened onto the city, the other onto the garden and the vast plain.

'I went. I shut the door leading to the city securely and, having thus shut it, I I suggested opening the door that led out onto the vast plain. Having pulled the latch, I looked out carefully. There I saw ten sages (*pîr*) with fine, kind features, whose respective positions formed an ascending hierarchical order[408] (…). Seized by immense fear and trembling with every fibre of my being, I took a step forward only to take a step back immediately (…).

'I was about to greet the Sage who stood at the end of the row, but his extreme natural kindness caused him to forestall me, and he gave me a smile so full of grace that his teeth became visible in my pupils (…).

– *Me*: In a word, tell me, these noble lords, from which direction have they deigned to come?

– *The Sage*: We are a brotherhood of immaterial beings (*mojarradân*). We all come from *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd* (the land of 'nowhere').

I couldn't make head nor tail of it.

– *Me*: So what climate (*eqlîm*) does this city belong to?

– *The Sage*: To a climate whose path cannot be pointed out by the finger (the index finger).

This time, I understood that he was a Sage whose profound knowledge penetrated to the very depths of things s[409] ."

3) Active imagination as an organ of supersensible perception

For Sohrawardî, the imagination is at times an angel and at times a demon. It is, in fact, situated in an in-between space, a *barzakh*, between the intellect and the faculty of estimation (*wahm*). When it is the intellect that guides it and teaches it to speak, the active imagination is good and becomes an angel. It is then called meditative or cogitative. Conversely, when the estimative faculty intrudes upon it, it becomes evil and transforms into *a demon*. It is called the faculty of the imaginary or fantasy. In this second case, it creates assemblages and collages such that man is haunted by dreadful nightmares, multi-headed beings, and delusional fantasies. But when it is subordinate to the intellect, it is through it (the cogitative) that spiritual beings manifest themselves 'in person' (*shakhs*). It is this faculty that enables the spiritual beings (*mashâyekh*), secluded in their corner, to contemplate the Spirits of the prophets and the Awliyâ in the same way that the Prophet once had a vision of the angel Gabriel in the form of the young Dahyâ al-Kalbî[410] .

Active imagination, serving the intellect, projects into the senses intellectual images of a spiritual nature, such as the vision of the Angel, the giant tree at the summit of Sinai, or the Burning Bush. But it operates 'in between'; it elevates the sensible to the subtle state and brings it there

to bring down the pure intelligible, clothing it in a form appropriate to its luminous nature. This encounter always takes place at the level of *the caro spiritualis*[411].

If, therefore, the metaphysics of the Imagination culminates in an encounter with the Angel, as in the example we have seen, the imaginary associated with the faculty of the estimative imagination, on the other hand, produces only demonic forms. "The estimative faculty," says Sohrawardî in *The Book of the Word of Sufism*, "is Iblis who refuses to bow down before the Khalifah and Word of God, whilst all the Angels, who are the faculties of the soul, bow down before this Word (which is the soul). 'Iblis refused and became proud, for he was among the unbelievers' (2:34). That is why all the immaterial realities acknowledged by the intellect are denied and rejected by this Iblis, who is the faculty of estimation[412]."

The noetic faculty of the *imaginal* world can transmute sensory data, rendering it as symbols to be deciphered. This transmutation amounts to a dematerialisation. 'It transforms the physical data imposed upon the senses into a pure mirror, into a spiritual transparency; it is then that, brought to incandescence, the Earth, and the things and objects and beings of the Earth, reveal to the visionary intuition the appearance of their Angels[413]." For this imagination does not construct the unreal—that would be the role of the imagination led astray by estimation—but *unveils* the hidden real. Its action is, in short, that of *ta'wîl*, the spiritual hermeneutics practised by all the Sages and spiritual Masters of Islam, of which "alchemical meditation is a privileged instance: to conceal the apparent, to manifest the hidden [414] ". But to see everything with the eye of the soul is also to undergo a transfiguration of all the senses. " 'When the eye of inner vision is opened, one must close the eye of outer vision,' says Sohrawardî. For in this way one succeeds in continuously contemplating the secret of the spiritual heavens, one enters the *Malakût*, one awakens the subtle organs of the body, one substitutes *the imaginatio vera* for the imagination; in short, one becomes a companion of the Angel. To save the image, to raise it to the level of the world that is its own, to preserve it from any reduction that would only lead to the production of delusional fantasies: this is the secret of *the Malakût*.

CHAPTER IV
The Western Exile

(an initiatory *hikâyat*)

The major themes of Sohrawardi's narrative are found in The *Tale of Western Exile* (*Qissat al-ghorbat al-gharbîya*). This tale is one of the works in which the encounter with the Angel is described as 'doctrine becoming an event of the soul'. In his translation of these tales (*The Crimson Archangel*), Henry Corbin groups the treatises according to whether they set out the 'doctrine of the mystical philosopher' or refer to level C of the *hikâyat*, where this same doctrine becomes an event of the soul, an encounter with the Ang e [415] .

Here the child of the East is sent into exile to a West that is the world of matter and is symbolised by the city of Qayrawân. Recognised by this people, the pilgrim is chained and thrown into the bottom of a well, from which he can only emerge at night. 'But during the hours of the night,' the narrator tells us, 'we (he and his father) would climb up to the castle, overlooking the vast expanse of space, and look out of a window. Frequently, doves from the forests of Yemen would come to us, informing us of the state of affairs in the forbidden region. Sometimes, too, we were visited by a flash of lightning from Yemen, whose glow, shining from the 'right side' (cf. 28:30), the 'eastern' side, informed us of the families living in the Naj d[416] ."

Then comes a message from the family in the beyond, carried by a hoopoe, urging him to set out without delay. So comes the awakening, then the departure and the quest for this East, which lies not to the east of our world, but in the cosmic north. The return to the East is also the ascent of Mount *Qâf*, the cosmic mountain with its emerald cities. And it is in this magical East that the exile meets the one who is his Angel, or, according to the Hermetic tradition taken up by Sohrawardî, his Perfect Nature[417] .

The narrative comprises three key sequences: 1) the fall into captivity and the escape; 2) the voyage on Noah's ark, which represents the initiatory journey of return; 3) the mystical Sinai, where the encounter with the personal Angel takes place.

The narrative is a striking testimony to the tri-unity that the *hikâyat* (mystical narrative) establishes between the narrator, the recited tale and the hero of the story. As he did with the *Book of Kings* (as we shall soon see), Sohrawardî here exemplarily applies his hermeneutical rule: 'Read the Qur'an as if it had been revealed solely for your own sake.'

The world of the Angel, the forbidden region, is here designated as Yemen. The term is equivalent to the East. The motif introducing this symbol is the 'right side' (*yaman*) of the valley where Moses beheld the Burning Bush. Furthermore, the Burning Bush represents the active imagination inspired by the Angel. It is precisely within this imaginative consciousness that the Gnostic's voyage in Noah's ark will be undertaken. The penetration into the world of the soul will be described in other accounts (*the Epistle of the High Towers* or the *Vade-mecum of the Faithful of Love*) as a progression through the unfolding spaces of a *mandala*; it is thus an 'imaginative scenography'[418] of the microcosm that the Gnostic must traverse to rediscover his spiritual homeland.

In *the Western Exile*, the vessel's ascent is vertical. The narrative progresses from prophet to

prophet, step by step, towards the heights of Being. The pilgrim first identifies with Noa é [419] . He is separated from his son, for the same reason as Noah: this son is not of his true family. He then identifies with Lot: ‘And I knew that the city which would give itself over to depravity’ (21:74) ‘would be overthrown from top to bottom’ (11:84)[420] . He then identifies with Moses, Solomon and Alexander, building a rampart against Gog and Magog g[421] .

This series of identifications is not allegorical “but *tautegorical*, because it is psychodramatic in the initiatory sense of the word: she is authentically what she is at this hermeneutic level which we have characterised as Level C, such that the narrator, in his act, identifies with the hero ” [422]. Moreover, the narrator begins to speak in the first person [423]: ‘Now there were spirits with *me* who were working in *my* service.’ This is precisely the significance of the spiritual experience contained within every initiation ritual. The journey draws to a close and the hero reaches the climax of the initiatory narrative, which is the Great Rock rising at the summit of the mystical Sinai. This Great Rock marks the threshold of the beyond, that is to say, the ‘convex side’ of the Sphere of Spheres, the ‘eighth climate’.

In the narrative of *the Vade-mecum of the Faithful of Love*, it is the mystical ride that takes the place of the voyage of Noah’s Ark. The heroic horseman dashes in a single bound out of the nine passes. He reaches a gateway that is that of the ‘Fortress of the Soul’, the *Shahrestân-e Jân*, encompassing the entire spiritual world. The sage who welcomes him there is known as ‘Eternal Wisdom ’ (*Jâvîdân Kharad*)[424] . He invites him to approach and ‘there, says Sohrawardî, is a spring called “the Water of Life” (*Âb-e zendegânî*), where he may learn and understand the Divine Book n[425] ’.

In the mystical Sinai, the pilgrim makes his way towards the Source of Life, then ascends Mount Sinai and the The rock which is his father’s oratory. There, he beholds his father in the likeness of a Great Sage[426].

The Sage says to him: ‘Take heart! You are now saved. However, you must absolutely return to the western prison, for you have not yet completely cast [off] your shackles[427].’ To the pilgrim’s wails of despair, the Sage replies: ‘That you must return there is inevitable for the time being. However, I shall give you two pieces of good news. The first is that, once you have returned to the prison, you will be able to come back to us again and easily ascend to our paradise whenever you wish. The second is that you will eventually be delivered entirely; you will come and join us, abandoning the western land completely and forever[428] .”

Now the exile has found the path to salvation and the joy of one who has been reunited with his own.

CHAPTER V
The encounter with the personal

angel (process of individuation)

In Sohrawardî's work, the Angel appears as the pilgrim's personal Guide (*pîr*), often in the form of a Sage of eternal youth. This young spiritual master (*pîr-e javân*) embodies the Angel of the Encounter in all of Sohrawardî's mystical narratives. This is therefore the tenth of the hierarchical Intelligences, the active Intelligence of the philosophers, the Holy Spirit or the Angel Gabriel. In the treatise of *the Vade-mecum*, this same Angel appears this time under the Persian name of *Jâvîdân Kharad*, which is the Iranian equivalent of the *sophia aetern a* [429].

The recognition of the Angel, recognised at times as an eternal child, at times as a wise youth, at times as Gabriel or 'eternal wisdom', is the realisation of this motto, which is the very foundation of all gnosis. 'He who knows himself (his soul) knows his Lord. " Thus, the figure of the Angel-Holy Spirit, as the Angel of the human race, becomes individualised for each person in the form of their Self or their "Perfect Nature", which an ancient Hermetic treatise in Arabic has Socrates describe as "the philosopher's personal angel[430] ".

1) Angel-Self – Perfect Nature

In his early treatises, Sohrawardî still espouses Avicennian angelology. For example, at the beginning of the initiatory narrative *The Rustling of Gabriel's Wings*, the visionary is confronted by the brotherhood of the ten sages, whose respective positions form an ascending hierarchical order, representing the Avicennian schema of the ten Intelligences. When Sohrawardî later moves beyond this schema, the Angel-Intelligence will also change its *position*: it will now be situated at the level of *the latitudinal order* of the Lords of the Species, that is to say, at the level where Platonic Ideas are translated into terms of Zoroastrian angelology[431] .

In Islamic gnosis, one often encounters the saying: 'He who knows himself (his soul, *nafsa-ho*) knows his Lord', along with its variations: 'He who knows himself knows his Imam. He who knows his Imam knows his Lord'. This maxim, says Corbin, has been pondered endlessly by the spiritual masters of Islam. In Sohrawardî's thought, this 'self' is represented by the 'Perfect Nature', or by the initiating Angel encountered in these Narratives. Furthermore, the vision of the 'Perfect Nature' is associated with the mystical deed of Hermes[432] .

But the 'Perfect Nature' is to the individual soul what the archetypal Angel (the Holy Spirit) is to humanity as a whole. The Perfect Nature is the individualised, singularised Form of the Angel for the pilgrim. It presents itself as his personal Guide and his own self. This 'Perfect Nature' (*al-Tibâ'al-tâmm*) is, in the final analysis, the 'philosopher's personal Angel'—not, of course, as his guardian angel, but as the spiritual counterpart, or *the* heavenly *alter ego*, of the earthly man. It is
"the individuation of the relationship between the Angel-Holy Spirit and each of his own, each of those for whom he is the *morshîd*, the guide[433] ". It can manifest itself "in person only to that one whose nature is perfect, that is to say, to the man of light; their relationship is that *unus-ambo* in which each of the two simultaneously assumes

simultaneously the position of *'I'* and *'you'* – image and mirror: my image looks at me through my own gaze; I look at it through its own gaze[434] ".

2) The two wings of Gabriel

Self-knowledge leads to union, or rather to the reunion of this empirical self and this transcendent self (the Self). "The heavenly self retains its objective reality, like that of the mirror facing me, in which I know and recognise myself[435]."

Since the mirror is what reveals my true 'face' to me, shattering that mirror would destroy this union itself, for in that way there would be no more face, no more face-to-face knowledge: the face of God for man and the face of man for God. This is the same theme we have already glimpsed in the initiatory journey of the birds in 'Attâr. The whole mystery of the Simorgh consists in the simultaneous co-presence of the eternal Simorgh and the *sî-morghs*, the thirty birds.

The essential relationship linking the earthly self to the heavenly or transcendent self is symbolised in Sohrawardî's accounts by the two wings of the angel Gabriel, 'one wing of light and one wing not exactly of darkness, but rather darkened, tinged with the reddish glow of evening twilight[436]'.

The two wings thus typify the 'dyadic structure' of the human being, at least that of the Gnostic, a dyad whose earthly journey has separated its parts. From the right wing springs Perfect Nature. From the left wing, the soul that remains entangled in the material world. 'The two twin wings symbolise the "heavenly twin" and the "earthly twin" referred to in Manichaean Gnosticism, that is to say, the relationship between the fallen soul and its heavenly counterpart[437] .

In the tale of *The Crimson Archangel*[438] , the imprisoned pilgrim, having escaped the watchful eyes of his jailers, ventures into the desert. And there in the desert he suddenly spots a figure approaching from his direction. Noticing the crimson hue that set his face and hair aglow, he says to him:

'O young man, whence comest thou?'

– 'Child,' he said to him, 'you are mistaken to address me thus. I am the eldest of the Creator's children, and yet you call me "young man"?'

– But then why is it that you have not turned white, as happens to old men?

– White I am, in truth; I am very ancient, a Sage whose essence is light. But the very one who took you prisoner in the net, who cast these various fetters about you and set these jailers to guard you, long ago cast me, too, into the Dark Well. And such is the reason for this purple hue in which you see me. Otherwise, I myself am all white and all luminous. If any white thing, whose whiteness is inseparable from light, should be mixed with black, it then indeed appears to glow red. Observe twilight and dawn, both white, since they are connected to the light of the sun. Yet twilight or dawn is a moment in between: one side towards the day, which is whiteness, one side towards the night, which is darkness, hence the crimson of the morning twilight and the evening twilight. "

To restore this *pair*, to rediscover the dual unity of their original constitution, is also to dispel the 'reddish shadow' to which the Angel alludes. For whenever the exiled self, captive in the Dark Well, identifies with its Perfect Nature, it thereby rediscovers its being of light. The two wings then become two mirrors reflecting one another: the face of God for man and the face of man for God.

This individuation, achieved at the conclusion of one's personal mystical initiation, manifests as a *duality* that is not one of two contradictions—'Ohrmazdian light and Ahrimanian darkness'—but rather that of Ohrmazd and his own Fravarti, two twins of light: the 'pacified soul' and its 'witness

in Heaven", Hermes and his Perfect Nature, Phos and his guide of light, consciousness and *superconsciousness e*[439] ».

> The incarnated soul thus possesses a celestial companion, who is ready to help it and to whom it must either

either to reunite or, on the contrary, to lose him forever, depending on whether his earthly life has made possible, or impossible, the return to the transcendent union of their dual-unity. 'However far you go, it is at the starting point that you will arrive again,' says Sohrawardî; 'like the point of a compass returning to itself.' But what has happened in the meantime? Something has taken place: the being one finds there, that is to say at the threshold of Mount *Qâf*, is the Self of our person. It is precisely there that the union of the two takes place; their bi-unity, just as in Mazdean eschatology it is at the entrance to the Chinvat Bridge that the angel Daênâ meets the self exiled to this earthly world.

CHAPTER VI
From the heroic epic to the mystical epic

In listing the characteristics of visionary narratives, we have observed that the Narrative (*hikâyat*) presents itself as a story, an imitation and a *ta'wîl*; that is to say, by wresting the past from its past, the narrative re-actualises it within a reversible time in which the narrative becomes an event of the soul within metahistory. Viewed from this perspective, every narrative is a *ta'wîl*: this is how Sohrawardî restores the Iranian epic to its mystical meaning, that is to say, to its *Orient*, where the heroic event is transformed into a mystical event experienced as a personal experience. Corbin calls this conversion the transition from the heroic epic to the mystical epic.

However, *the epos* of epics can correspond to different levels. According to Corbin, there may indeed be an epic whose *epos*—its *narrative*—remains within metahistory, 'remaining forever ontologically *pre-historical*'. And there may be an epic whose *epos* recounts the reconquest of this meta-history; this is *the* mystical *epos*, the epic of the Gnostic, of the exile who, having come to a foreign world, finds himself at home, in his own world. "Between the two lies the heroic epic, whose *epos* recounts the deeds accomplished by heroes whose dimension is different from that of the characters in the chronicle, because their person and their deeds already move within a dimension that is that of the eighth clima t[440] . ' And it is precisely this dimension that will enable the heroic epic to culminate in a mystical epic, that is to say, to find its denouement in the East in the Sohrawardian sense of the word.

Thus, precisely because certain heroes already possess a dimension
'Eastern', they come to resemble the exiles of the West, since their journey, like that of the exiles, is a rite of passage aimed at reclaiming the mystical Sinai of the soul and returning to their own people. The *hikâyat* describing the exile's journey, just like the heroic narrative characterising the hero's life, follow a parallel course. However, the hero is unique in that he is also, historically, a public and mythical figure: at times the Wise Sovereign, holder of the Holy Grail; at others, the glorious hero of the Kayanid dynasty. His special status confers upon him a royal *aura* that sets him apart from the pilgrim proper. Yet the Eastern purpose of both is strictly identical, since they both put into practice the principle of breaking free from historical causality and proceed to the same conversion: leading the pilgrim-man or the hero-man back to his origin, to his East. The mystical epic and the initiatory narrative emerge at the moment when the heroic deed and the quest become personal events and can only be expressed through *narrative*.

Ultimately, the heroes 'undergo an Eastern transmutati e[441]'. For the transformation of the Iranian heroic tradition into a mystical epic is entirely consistent with the aims of Eastern theosophy. Just as Sohrawardî brings the Hellenised Magi back to an Islamic Iran, so too is the transformation of the heroic epic of Iran into a mystical epic a phenomenon of transmutation undergone by the Sages of ancient Iran, enabling them to find their place in Sohrawardî's Islamic Persia[442] .

On the other hand, just as the *hikâyat* presupposed an intermediate world situated between the sensible and the intelligible, so too does the transformation of the epic into a mystical narrative imply the existence of this intermediate world, which is the *Malakût*. This is therefore the place where the transition from the heroic epic to the mystical epic takes place.

Moreover, this passage, precisely because it presupposes the internalisation of the worlds, is also a passage into the hierohistory of the soul. It is therefore eschatological. By returning 'home', the hero undergoes an alchemical transmutation: his place of Return (*ma'âd*) is also the place of his Origin (*mabda'*). It is not, however, a matter of setting out from oneself in order to arrive back at oneself. Between departure and arrival, a great event will have changed everything. The self that one finds there at the summit of the cosmic mountain (*Qâf*) is the transcendent Self, 'the second-person self', that is to say, the hero's face-to-face encounter with his personal angel. The hero undergoes individuation with all its consequences: the reconstitution of the Primordial Couple, the bi-unity of the two parts of the being, and finally the conjunction of the 'two wings' of the archangel Gabriel.

1) The Ecstatic Sage of Ancient Persia (Kay Khosraw)

a) Kay Khosraw – the archetype of the knight

Iran's spiritual calling was to forge a link between the Abrahamic tradition, which it had adopted through Islam, and the Zoroastrian tradition, which it had inherited from its time-immemorial origins. With Sohrawardî, who restored the illuminative wisdom of the ancient Persians within Iranian Islam, we witness the metamorphosis of the heroic epic of ancient Iranian chivalry into the mystical epic of the pilgrim of God, within Iranian Sufism.

'It was through a perfectly accurate intuition,' says Corbin, 'that Eugenio d'Ors, commenting on the Avestan idea of the Angel and the Fravarti—the celestial entity that is the archetype of every creature of Light—was able to write: "The religion of Zoroaster translates into a sort of Order of chivalry"[443]. The Sohrawardian epic of the Gnostic hero, on the quest for the Grail of Jamshîd (Kay Khosraw), bears many similarities to the mystical epic of the West, that of the quest for the Grail. "And just as the idea of the mystical hierarchy of the Order" of *the Ishrâqîyûn* led us back to the idea of the esoteric hierarchy professed in Shi'ism, so too has this, on numerous occasions, has led us to perceive certain echoes of the chivalric ethic of ancient Iran on the one hand, and of the Western chivalric ethic on the other (…). There is a common *ethos*, a shared situation among believers united by the Zoroastrian concept of the Saoshyant (Saviour, future Messiah) and among believers united by the expectation of the Parousia of the Imam, as well as among believers awaiting the reign of the Paraclete. And it was no small insight from our research to observe that our Shia theosophers had identified the Twelfth Imam with both the Zoroastrian Saoshyant and the Paraclete foretold in the Gospel of John , no[444]."

Just as the quintessential archetype of knighthood is the Imam in the Shia conception of chivalry, so too does Kay Khosraw, the ecstatic hero of ancient Persia, remain for Sohrawardî the exemplary model of every knight on a quest for the Grail. It is therefore not surprising that he is also the keeper of the Cup of Jam. Any quest in search of the soul of the world – that of the Gnostic pilgrim exiled to this world, as well as that of the knight remaining faithful to the pact of pre-eternity, Parsifal as well as Kay Khosraw – presupposes belonging to another world. One enters this world by *birthright*, but in reality one belongs only to the world of the 'eighth climate', that is to say, to the world of the invisible. This is why the duty of every Gnostic or every hero worthy of the name is to return to the world to which he has always belonged.

The duration of each quest is thus a *quantum* of 'chivalric time', but 'chivalric time' unfolds 'between times'. 'Chivalric time', like that of Parsifal, the Imam or Kay Khosraw, does not end on a specific date in the chronology, but is a time of the occultation[445] . Similarly, the story of Kay Khosraw, or that of the Grail, did not conclude with

the hero's occultation (return to the eighth climate) but continues in the dimension of eschatology, since the hero, by occulting himself, joins the 'saviours', the future Saoshyants who will come, at their parousia, to bring about the transfiguration of the world.

By linking the mystical epic of Persia's ecstatic heroes to the Gnostic idea of return, Sohrawardî connects the knights of Iran to the shared ethos of chivalry as a whole and internalises the interpretation of Ferdowsî's *Shahnameh* (10th century), in the same way that one might interpret the Bible or the Qur'an. Thus the *Shahnameh*, along with the deeds of the heroes of ancient Persia, also falls within the phenomenon of the 'Holy Book', just as the status of the knight (*Javanmard*) is identified with *the ethos* of every pilgrim in search of his soul. It was thanks to the openness afforded by the hermeneutics of the Holy Book in Islam that Sohrawardî was able to integrate the wisdom of ancient Iran so masterfully into the body of humanity's sacred texts.

b) Kay Khosraw and the Royal Xvarnah

The great book of *Eastern Theosophy* states that Kay Khosraw was granted, even before Zoroaster, a direct vision of the Ohrmazdian 'sources of the Light of Glory', that is to say, the *Xvarnah* (Persian: *Khorrah*), which is both the 'glory' and the 'destiny' of beings of Light. But this Light-of-Glory has other forms of manifestation, and among these is the Grail cup (*Jâm-e Jam*), the contemplation of which reveals secrets of the invisible[446] .

The primordial king Jamshîd and the rulers of the dynasty of
The Kayânids, particularly Kay Khosraw, who, like a few other epic heroes, was granted the rare privilege of stepping outside the visible world without actually crossing the threshold of death. Kay Khosraw was the son of Prince Siyâvash, a figure of tragic destiny, murdered by Afrâsyâb, the Turanian, who is the very prototype of the antagonist opposing Iranian chivalry. It therefore fell to Kay Khosraw to defeat him once and for all.

The figure and fate of Kay Khosraw have been compared to the character of Parsifal in the Grail cycle of the West. Corbin believes that more than one trait justifies the comparison, although these similarities also have their limits.

Firstly, there is the famous castle built by Kay Khosraw's father, which has prompted comparisons with the Grail Castle[447]. This is the citadel of *Kang Dêz*. This castle lies somewhere in the far north, near the celestial pole, the Emerald Rock, where, according to Sohrawardî, the 'eighth climate' (the Intermediate East) begins. It is therefore believed to be situated at the summit of the cosmic mountain Alborz, the Iranian version of Mount Qâf. To reach it, one would have to cross the central climate (*Erân-Vej*), in the midst of the worlds. The descriptions given of it bear a strong resemblance to those describing the fabulous cities of the eighth climate: *Jâbalqâ, Jâbarsâ, Hûrqaly â*[448] .

In this castle lives one of Zoroaster's sons, Khorshâd-Čehr, in the company of other eschatological knights who will help him lead the final battle against the Ahrimanian forces. It is also here that, as we shall soon see, the ecstatic hero Kay Khosraw will take refuge as one of the seven eschatological princes surrounding the future saviour Saoshyant.

The Iranian hero's childhood, moreover, reveals striking similarities to that of Parsifal. Like Parsifal, he was raised by his mother in the solitude of the mountains[449] and forests. His long and arduous quest will take him on a seven-year journey filled with miraculous adventures, in pursuit of Afrâsyâb. Rides through the desert, mysterious voyages to the shores of China and beyond China, to the distant shores of Mekran, where the hero embarks on a seven-month voyage, and finally succeeds in reaching Afrâsyâb's fortress, which is a sort of underground castle, the inverted form

of Kang-Dêz. All these events take place in mythical lands, untraceable on our usual maps. Having destroyed the Evil One, the hero returns triumphantly home to *Erân-Vêj* (Cradle of the Aryans). From then on, the Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*) rests solely upon Kay Khosraw, who is now the holder of 'Royal Glory'.

This is what Sohrawardî says in the *Partow-nâmeh* (the *Book of the Ray of Light*):

'To him who knows wisdom (*hikmat*, *theosophia*), who persists in giving thanks and in the divine service of the Light of Lights (…), to him is given the Light of Royal Glory (*Khorrah-ye kayânî*, the *Xvarnah*) and is bestowed the splendour of Light (*Farr-e nûrânî*). A divine flash of light clothes him in the robe of majesty and beauty. He becomes the natural ruler of the world. From the supreme world comes the assistance that grants victory. His Word is heard in the world above. His dreams and inspiration attain to Perfectio n[450] ."

The union in a single person of the sage endowed with royal authority and the King with a hieratic soul stems from that characteristic mode of *the Xvarnah* which the Avesta (*Yasht* XIX) calls *Kavaênam Xvarêno*, that is to say, the Royal Light of Glory. 'Such was the charisma of this exceptional king, the prototype of the royal sage with a hieratic soul, and from whose name Sohrawardî derives the appellation *khosrawânîyûn*, which he himself bestowed upon the sages of ancient Persi e [451].'

c) Kay Khosraw and the Jâm-e Jam (Chalice of the Grail)

When this sovereign's reign draws to a close, Kay Khosraw prepares for his final journey. He first receives a heavenly warning instructing him to prepare for the Great Renunciation, then he sets up camp before the city and makes the necessary arrangements to maintain order. Finally, he bids farewell to his people and sets off towards a high and distant mountain. And Sohrawardî describes:

"At last, the herald of love (of spiritual beings and their world[452]) summoned him. And he replied: 'Here I am' (*labbayk*). The command of the magistrate Ardent-Desire (*shawq*) reached him, and he accepted it with docility. His *father* in the spiritual world was calling him, and he heard his *father* calling him. He responded to his call and migrated towards God, abandoning, as he prepared his departure towards Him, all sovereignty over this world (…). No other king is remembered whom divine power set in motion to depart, as he did from his earthly domains. Hail to that day when the blessed King Kay Khosraw parted from his earthly homeland, the day he joined the world above ! [453] »

Eight of his loyal knights decided to accompany him on his journey, but the king warned them: the path he must take led through desert lands, and since they could not follow him 'all the way to Heaven' anyway, they should at least spare themselves the trouble of the return journey. Three of them take this advice: Godarz, Zâl and Rostam. The other five insist and stay behind. One evening they stop to rest by a spring. Then the King bathes in the spring and his companions suddenly realise that he has vanished. Overcome by fatigue, they fall asleep and are buried by a snowstorm. They will never wake again in this world. It is only in this way that they, too, can join the prince whom they loved and admired so dearly. Thus ends the episode of *the Shahnameh* and the references to it made by Sohrawardî[454].

Kay Khosraw's visionary ecstasy is of the same kind as that which elevated Zoroaster when he had the vision of the Divine Heptad during his conversations with the 'Immortal Archangels'. It is also analogous to the conversations of the Sage described in the Pahlavi book which bears precisely the title *Mênôke-Xrat* (Celestial Wisdom).

However, whilst Kay Khosraw embodies the Wise King, he is also, thanks to the innate knowledge with which he seems endowed, the visionary par excellence, and this is what the Grail cup, of which he is the keeper, symbolises.

In the narrative of *The Language of Ants*, Sohrawardî describes the 'hieratic virtues' of this Hero as follows[455]:

"Kay Khosraw possessed the Great Mirror of the Universe. Whatever he might desire, he beheld in this Grail. In it he scrutinised all beings; in it he was informed of the invisible worlds. This Grail was enclosed in a leather sheath whose shape had been fashioned on a lathe, and which had ten joints. Whenever Kay Khosraw wished to contemplate some mystery of the unseen, he would place this sheath on the lathe (to unravel it). Once he had loosened all the ties, the Grail would vanish. But when all the ties were bound anew in the workshop, the Grail would reappear.

"At the time of the spring equinox, Kay Khosraw held the Grail aloft towards the Sun, and the sun's rays struck the Grail; behold, all the lines and imprints of the worlds were revealed there s[456] ."

The Cup is one of the manifestations of the royal *Xvarnah* held by Kay Khosraw; it is often therefore referred to in Persian mystical literature as denoting the 'cosmo-vision' (*dîd-e Jahânbîn*) of the seer, as opposed to the narrow vision of the pious devotee (Hâfez).

The Grail of Jamshîd, like that of Kay Khosraw, is a *microcosm*. In other words, it is the 'Mirror of the Universe'. Its possessor may contemplate the occult mysteries of the universe within it. The account described by Sohrawardî suggests that the 'Cup of the Universe' is the microcosm (Light of *Espahbad*) enclosed within the body, that is to say, the 'leather sheath'. When one seeks to release this captive light—in other words, when one loosens the bonds—the 'Cup' becomes invisible and the soul rises to its East, which is its *abode* beyond this world. It is therefore visible only when the leather sheath (the physical body) binds it once more. Hence the ten joints symbolising the five external senses and the five internal senses[457]

At the time of the spring equinox, Kay Khosraw contemplates there all the wonders of the cosmos, "not so much the affairs of the seven climes of the earthly world, as those of an invisible world whose planets and constellations are but signs s[458] ". However, in order to partake of this vision—that is to say, to penetrate the inner vision revealed by this Cup (*Jâm-gîtî-namâ*) ("Cup that reveals the cosmos"), one must have a body of light, and possess the *Xvarnah* both at the level of being and at that of the epiphany which makes man a true microcosm. In other words, one must be a hieratic figure, like the charismatic sovereign Kay Khosraw, who, invested with *the* royal *Xvarnah*, set free, like a blazing flame, the *Espahbad* Light imprisoned within the perishable remains of our 'skin sheath'.

CHAPTER VII
Transfigured Eros

The evolution of the metaphysical theme of the Active Intellect into a mystical epic of love in Sohrawardî marks a transition to the doctrine of the 'Friends of Love' as found in Rûzbehân of Shîrâz and Ibn 'Arabî.

For Corbin, the idea of *transfigured eros* was suggested by the Russian philosopher Boris Vycheslavtsev, whose book *Ethics of Eros* is a major contribution to research on the imagination. Regarding this philosopher, Corbin states: "Accepting the conclusions of 'depth psychology', the philosopher believes that only the imagination provides the key to the subconscious, because it elevates psychic energy to a 'higher' level. The process of *sublimation* corresponds to this transfiguration of man through the spiritual path, to this deification of which the Christian mystic speaks. By invoking sublimation as the driving force of the soul, Vycheslavtsev is able to speak of a new ethics, of a transcendence of moralism: 'The true ethics of grace is that which is capable of transfiguring and sublimating ' [459]."

Yet this power of transfiguration bestowed upon *the imagination* makes it possible to bring the invisible and the visible into harmony; it also makes it possible to represent the Beloved and the Lover as concrete figures. The very place of their encounter immediately raises the need to recognise the distinct ontology of an imaginal world, where the power of the imagination is precisely at work. For every true encounter implies a transformation of being. This appears in Sohrawardî as *ta'alloh* (*theosis*), which is an illumination; just as in Rûzbehân, for example, it implies the transfiguration of human Eros into divine Eros. In Ibn 'Arabî, this same creative imagination projects a space of its own, where the spiritual and the sensible meet in an imaginative union, for without the transfiguration wrought by the imagination, all union is an illusion. Divine Love is Spirit without body; physical love is a body without spirit. Spiritual love, on the other hand, possesses both spirit and body (Ibn 'Arabî).

Moreover, it is also this transformation of metaphysical entities into concrete figures of transfigured Eros that is suggested to us by Sohrawardî's short mystical novel, *The Handbook of the Devotees of Love*.

1) Beauty, Love, Nostalgia-Sadness

Shaykh Al-Ishrâq's insight was to substitute, in this context, the triad of entities from Avicennian cosmogony with three characters from a drama. Intelligence is beauty, the celestial soul is love, and the heavens are nostalgia. Thus, the triad of Intelligence, Soul and Heaven becomes, respectively, Beauty (*Nîkû'î*), Love (*Mihr*) and Nostalgia (*Andûh*). These three terms no longer denote a logical universal or a concrete individuality of the external world, but rather 'essences' that can only be manifested at the level of *the imaginal*, or even of Eros transfigured by the characters of a symbolic novel.

Indeed, in Avicennian cosmogony, this first Intellect, which Sohrawardî designates by the name Bahma n[460], performs three acts of contemplation from which proceed, respectively, a second Intellect, the first Soul and the first Heaven. The Soul aspires, out of love, to unite with the Intelligence from which it emanates. Heaven marks the distance separating the Intelligence and the Soul, and the Soul

draws Heaven along in its movement of love for the Intelligence[461] .

This first transfiguration will be personified in the treatise of *the Vade-mecum of the Faithful of Love*.

The three entities manifest themselves as three persons who no longer bear their cosmogonic names, "but the name of their appearance (of their 'phenomenon') in the inner world of man, and consequently at the level where the religion of transfigured Eros is established[462] ". Their names indeed denote active *essences,* but essences whose energy still undergoes a process of personification to take concrete form in three new figures derived from the Qur'an and the Bible: Joseph (Beauty), Zolaykhâ (Love), Jacob (Sorrow). Compared to the three cosmogonic entities that proceed from the triple intellect of the First Intelligence, these three *dramatis personae* are less abstractions than symbolisations, since they also correspond, as we have just seen, to the figures of biblical-Quranic hagiography. Let us read Sohrawardî himself once more:

'Know that the first being God created was an essence of light, whose name is Intelligence (*Noûs, 'aql*). This tradition states: "The first being that God created was Intelligence". And God the Most High endowed this essence with three properties: knowledge of God, knowledge of the self, and knowledge of the fact that at first it did not exist and then came into being. Through that of its properties which relates to its knowledge of God, beauty was manifested, which is called *Mihr* in Persian. Through the property relating to its knowledge of itself, love was manifested, which in Persian is called *Nikû'î*. Through the property relating to its knowledge that its non-being preceded its being, nostalgia was manifested, which in Persian is called *Andûh*.

'And these three beings: Beauty, Love, Nostalgia, sprung from the same original source, are *brothers* to one another. Beauty, who is the eldest brother, contemplated herself. She saw herself as the Supreme Good; joy was born within her, and she smiled. Then thousands of angels of the highest rank were manifested, springing from that smile. Love, the middle brother, was Beauty's constant companion. He could not take his eyes off her, and remained a devoted servant at her side. When Beauty's smile appeared to him, he was seized by a dizzying madness; he was overwhelmed. He wanted to make a move, to leave. But Nostalgia, the youngest brother, clung to him. And it was from this clinging of Nostalgia embracing Love that Heaven and Earth came into be e[463] ."

The rest of Sohrawardî's account describes the gradual manifestation of these three essences, which manifest themselves respectively in a human being of this world, with whom each forms a bond in order to achieve perfect identification or, if you will, to become the *embodiment of its archetype*.

The young Joseph will thus be the embodiment of Beauty, because Love symbolises the first act of the triple contemplation of the First Intelligence. Zolaykhâ will be the embodiment of Love, because the latter symbolises the aspiration, the surge of love of the celestial soul towards the Intelligence from which it emanates. And Jacob will be the embodiment of Nostalgia, because Nostalgia embodies the distance that exists between Intelligence and the Soul, between Love and Beauty; the distance between Jacob in the land of Canaan and Joseph in Egypt[464]

Let us summarise this story briefly to highlight its key points.

First of all, Love cannot detach itself from Beauty; it is almost its slave. When it finally decides to free itself and return to its own path, Nostalgia clings to it. "And it is from this embrace of Sadness," says Corbin, "which holds love in the unfulfilled nostalgia for Beauty, that Heaven and Earth were born and endure. For separation—the prohibition of Beauty, which has become inaccessible to love—is the secret not only of the 'history' of the Gnostic, but of the entire human race, indeed of the whole universe[465]."

The first episode refers to an ‘event in Heaven’. Beauty, learning of Adam’s existence—before whom all the angels prostrated themselves—rushes on her steed towards the fortress where Adam was born. Love and Sorrow follow her immediately. Beauty takes complete possession of Adam’s form, which becomes her epiphany: Love is once again struck dumb with wonder. Once again Nostalgia comes to his aid; he sees all beings kissing the ground at Beauty’s threshold: ‘all the Angels worshipped her’ ([15
:30], Qur’an).

A second episode opens with the ‘story’ of Joseph, who in Islamic mystical literature typifies the perfect epiphany of Beauty. Love and Nostalgia appear there but are rebuffed with holy indifference. Thus begins the story of *separation*.

Each of the two young brothers goes his own way. Each will choose the chosen one capable of *typifying* and symbolising him. Nostalgia goes to the land of Canaan. Jacob, seeing him arrive, discerns in him the imprint of Love. Having questioned him, Nostalgia replies, like the Angel in most of Sohrawardî’s tales, ‘I come from *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd* (the land of Nowhere).’ Jacob identifies so closely with Nostalgia after the secret of initiation that he becomes the living embodiment of Nostalgia-Sorrow.

Love travels to Egypt, and this episode traces the origins of the archetypal couple Joseph and Zolaykhâ in the mystical epic of Islam.

Zolaykhâ, seeing him appear, asked him: ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘I come from the region that is the Land of the Spirit (*Rûh-âbâd*, the spiritual world), via the steep path of Beauty. I have a dwelling in the immediate vicinity of Nostalgia. My profession is to travel. I am a Sufi without ties. At every moment I set off in a new direction. Each day I pass a milestone; each night I make a dwelling my resting place. When I am among the Arabs, they call me *’Ishq*. When I come among the Persians, they call me *Mihr* (Mithra)[466] . In the heavens I am known as the one who sets things in motion. On earth, I am known as the one who brings things to a standstill (…). Though I am poor, I am of noble lineage. Long is my history[467] …’

Love initiates Zolaykhâ into its mystery. A nine-stage path leads to its realm. Beyond the
‘vault of nine domes’ rises the fortress of the soul (*shahrestân-e Jân*). One must thus emerge from the cosmic crypt to reach the place of Nowhere (*Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*).

At the heart and summit of the fortress rises the Source of Life, and above this ‘City of the Soul’ stand further fortresses.

Zolaykhâ surrenders her entire being to the power of Love. When Joseph appears, ‘Love enfolds Zolaykhâ’s shoulder and the two of them proceed towards the contemplation that brings an end to their separation. Zolaykhâ *is* Love; Beauty and Love are [united468]’.

Nostalgia leads Jacob to Egypt. And it is whilst seated on the throne that Jacob beholds Joseph and
Zolaykhâ. When Nostalgia sees Love reunited with Beauty, she falls to her knees and prostrates herself with her face to the ground. Jacob and his children also prostrate themselves with their faces to the ground, ‘then Joseph, addressing Jacob, said to him: “O my father! Here is the symbolic interpretation (*ta’wîl*) of the dream I told you: Father, behold, I saw eleven stars, as well as the Sun and the Moon. And I saw them prostrating themselves before me’ (Qur’an 12:4)[469] ”.

The account in *the Vade-mecum of the Devotees of Love* highlights the profound harmony of the mysticism of love in
Sohrawardî and other great champions of Love such as Rûzbehân and Ibn ’Arabî. This mystical tradition would later come to characterise a vast body of Persian literature, in which the transition (already begun by Ferdowsî and further emphasised by Sohrawardî) from heroic epic to mystical epic became increasingly distinct. As for the transition from human love to divine love, already posited in Sohrawardî’s account, it would become, in Rûzbehân’s work as well as in that of Ibn ’Arabî, the keystone of the entire epic of love. This transformation would not consist in substituting a divine object for a human one, but in bringing about this

metamorphosis of the soul in which human love and divine love become the two faces of one and the same Love.

BOOK V
From Human Love to Divine Love

CHAPTER I
Rûzbehân, or the Master of Inspired Paradoxes

Of all the masters of Sufism, Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūzbehān of Shīrāz are the ones who have taken the analysis of the phenomena of love furthest. We have also seen that the transformation of the metaphysical themes of the Active Intellect into a mystical epic of love had already begun with Sohrawardî, and that the narrative of *the Vade-mecum of the Friends of Love* marked a transition to the doctrine of the Friends of Love, which had such a profound influence on the school of Ibn ’Arabî and its manifold repercussions in Iran. This is all the more interesting given that of the one hundred and fifty commentaries written on one of Ibn ’Arabî’s most famous works, the *Fosûs al-Hikam*, approximately one hundred and thirty—whether written in Arabic or Persian—were authored by Persians.

Furthermore, the 12th century and the early 13th century saw the emergence of a philosophical landscape of major significance. Corbin discerns highly significant synchronicities here that go far beyond mere chronological coincidences. Indeed, it was in the 12th century that Sohrawardî established the ancient Persian doctrine concerning Light and Darkness.

A year before the birth of Ibn ‘Arabî, on 8 August 1164, the ‘Great Resurrection’ was proclaimed in the fortress of Alamut in north-western Iran. Thanks to this declaration, Iranian Neo-Ismailism took on the characteristics of a religion of personal salvation and spiritual resurrection, which would enable it to survive the vicissitudes of time by donning the mantle of Sufism, when the fortress of Alamut was razed to the ground by the Mongol hordes.

In the 13th century, driven out by the Mongol invaders, Sufis from Central Asia retreated to central and western Iran. In Transoxiana, another great spiritual master, Najmuddin Kobra, set Sufism on a new course, directing it towards the subtle physiology of the ‘coloured lights’ experienced during spiritual states. His school would include prestigious disciples: Najmoddîn Râzî, ’Azîzoddîn Nasafî, ’Alâoddawleh Semnânî. In the same century (the 13th), in Neyshâpûr in Khorâsân, Farîdoddîn ’Attâr composed his mystical rhapsodies in Persian. Faced with the Mongol advance, Jalâloddîn Rûmî[470], still a teenager, accompanied by his father, met ’Attâr; they emigrated to Anatolia and settled in Konya, Turkey.

At the beginning of that same century (1201), Ibn ’Arabî emigrated to the East, leaving his native land, Andalusia, behind for good. He thus became a pilgrim of the East, where he propagated a mysticism of love of incomparable power that would leave its mark on all subsequent speculations regarding the dialectic of love. Thanks to Sadroddîn Qonyawî (671/1272 or 673/1273–74), his doctrine spread throughout the Iranian world. The latter served as the link between Ibn ’Arabî and Iranian Sufism. He was associated with Jalâloddîn Rûmî and also became the teacher of ’Erâqî, one of the great mystical poets of the Persian language. ’Erâqî’s *Lama’ât* (Glimpses) drew their inspiration from Ibn ’Arabî’s *Fosûs*, which Qonyawî taught him. Furthermore, the connection between Ibn ’Arabî’s mysticism and Sohrawardî’s *Ishrâq*, via Haydar Amolî (who synthesises Sufism and Shî’ism) and Ibn Abî Jomhûr (15th) (who elaborates the cohesion between Sohrawardî’s Ishrâq theosophy, that of Ibn ’Arabî and Shia Islam), ultimately led to the great Shia thinkers and theosophers of the Isfahan School such as Mollâ Sadrâ.

Such are the historical parallels (12th and 13th centuries) that allow us to situate Rûzbehân of Shîrâz spiritually, who left this world a few months after Ibn 'Arabî had definitively abandoned Andalusia. Thus he is the elder of Ibn 'Arabî whilst being the continuator of a tradition of the mysticism of love which was already emerging in Sohrawardî as the doctrine of transfigured Eros. This is why he shares many common features with both Sohrawardî and Ibn 'Arabî. Rûzbehân (1128–1209) was a contemporary of Sohrawardî, but whilst the latter was a man from northern Iran, Rûzbehân was originally from the south, from Fars, that is to say, from 'Persia'.

It was with the assistance of Dr Mohammad Mo'în, a professor at the University of Tehran, that Corbin undertook the restoration of Rûzbehân's work. The Jasmine of *the Believers in Love* (*Kitâb-e 'Abhar al-'ashiqîn*), a treatise on Sufism, appeared in Persian with an introduction and a translation of the first chapter into French in the Bibliothèque iranienne in 1958. In 1966, Corbin published another very important Persian text by Rûzbehân; his commentary on the paradoxes of the Sufis (*Sharh-e Shathîyât*) (Bibliothèque iranienne, 1966). Most of Corbin's studies were later included in his **En Islam iranien**, vol. III, where he elaborated extensively on the doctrine of the Faithful of Love and the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism.

1) A visionary par excellence

Abû Mohammad ibn Abî Nasr Rûzbehân was born in Fasâ, a village in the region of Shîrâz, in 522 AH (1128 AD). He died at the age of eighty-four (lunar years). The shaykh bears a typically Iranian name. The two elements *rûz* (day) and *beh* (happy, fortunate) form a compound conveying the meaning of 'someone whose day is blessed', or whose 'fortune is favourable' (*khwosh-bakht*)[471].

Authors commonly refer to him as 'Rûzbehân Baqlî Shîrâzî'. The word Baqlî, which is the *nisba* accompanying his name, comes from the noun *baql* (plural *boqûl)*: herbs and vegetables, and probably alludes to the shop the shaykh owned in his youth, where he sold herbs and vegetables, until that memorable day when he threw it all away. He is also known as the Master of Paradoxes, or the 'master of excesses' (*shaykh shattâh*). This particular nickname alludes to the singularity of his doctrine, in which *paradox*—the ambivalent aspect of ambiguity—plays an essential role.

To learn about the Shaykh's life during his childhood and his early mystical experiences, the best course of action would be to read his *Diarium Spirituale*, the *Kashf al-asrâr*. Rûzbehân's 'spiritual diary' was written by him at the request of a friend. He was fifty-five years old at the time; he was fifteen, he says, when his visionary experiences began to occur. It is therefore a record of his visions and dreams from the age of fifteen. Rûzbehân reveals himself here as having been, from childhood, endowed with exceptional emotional power and visionary ability. At fifteen he left home. A vision revealed to him his secret rank in the mystical hierarchy. Then a succession of magnificent visions followed: visions of angels and beings of beauty, of landscapes in bloom, of glowing dawns. 'All of Rûzbehân's books,' says Corbin, 'are written in a highly personal language, vibrating with a continuous ecstatic lyricism that does not always make them easy to read. Nevertheless, this autobiographical journal provides us with the experiential basis for identifying the stages and trials through which the dialectic of love leads, on the path of theophanies, to esoteric *tawhîd*[472]."

The experience of these mystical encounters, which began in childhood, gave rise to such visionary power that it transformed people and things into faces of beauty: 'My secret consciousness (*sirr*) (…) was grounded in the supersensible realities (*haqâ'iq*) and thus began my ascent through the degrees of the mystical ladder. I experienced the spiritual stations (*maqâmât*), the transient inner states (*ahwâl*), the revelations (*mokâshafât*), the high knowledge of *tawhîd*; in short, I

“I journeyed through the enchanted realms of the heart, making countless discoveries of the invisible worlds[473].” He sees angels, celestial beauties: “I saw the Angels of the Spirit (*rûhânîyûn*), the Angels of the
The Angels of Dominion (*rabbânîyûn*), the Angels of Holiness (*qodsîyûn*), the Angels of Majesty (*jalâlîyûn*), the Angels of Beauty (*jamâlîyûn*)[474] … ’ He sees the four angels, the Prophet in a state of ecstasy, the Black Stone, the four bearers of the throne: ‘It appeared to me that I was in the Temple of Mecca (*al-masjad al-harâm*). I saw the Prophet, who seemed to be in a state of ecstasy. He was circumambulating; he was near the Black Stone, on the left side of the Ka’ba. Gabriel stood beneath the portico, near the Gate of Safâ. Michael stood beside him, Seraphiel beside them both, whilst a pair of angels stood in the courtyard of the Temple. (…) It seemed to me that the Ka’ba itself was shaking and drawing nearer to them. Then I danced with them. God made Himself visible to them, and I was there with them, sharing their loving ecstasy, savouring a deep pe e[475] .”

There is also the encounter with Khidr. Like Ibn ‘Arabî, Rûzbehân is a disciple of Khidr: a
Sufi who, prior to any contact with a human being, receives his initiation into the celestial world through the ministry of the one who is the personal master of all the ‘masterless ones ’ [476] (those whom, in Shi’ism, we call the *Owaysis*). Thus the encounter with Khizr symbolises the encounter with the divine counterpart of one’s being, the attainment of the source of life, which is always a rebirth or a new birth.
‘At that time I was still ignorant of the higher theosophical sciences… and then I saw Khezr. He gave me an apple, of which I ate a piece. He said to me: “Eat it all…” so my mouth opened of its own accord, and the entire contents of that sea of Light entered it; not a single drop remained that I did not absorb e[477] .’

There is also the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*), the most blessed of all nights.
“On this night the Angels and the Spirit descend with their Lord’s permission to settle all matters: and it is a peace that lasts until the break of dawn (97:45)[478] .” Rûzbehân has a vision of the Angel Gabriel, who appears to him in the guise of the Eternal Feminine: “God showed me all the Angels, all of whom had human form (…). Among them was Gabriel, and he is the most beautiful of the Angels. The tresses of their hair were like those of women. Their faces were like the red rose[479] . ” This eternal Feminine, such a powerful archetype in the doctrine of transfigured Eros, also bursts onto the scene as a “charming fairy”, a “heavenly maiden”, whose personality remains vague but whose dazzling beauty Rûzbehân describes using “all the resources that the Persian language places at his disposal n[480] ”. These visions confirm the manifold theophanies of the One who is, by essence, forever invisible, and whose refusal Moses heard (*Thou shalt not see me*). It is this paradox of the invisible Essence and recurring theophanies, says Corbin, which is affirmed and lived out throughout Rûzbehân’s personal experience, because it is only possible to love with love a being of a specific person and face[481]. This is the secret of the theophany that underlies Rûzbehân’s metaphysics.

2) A vision that thinks in images

The profusion of images, the exuberance of visions, and the exaltation of emotions, intertwined with increasingly intense states of contemplation, suggest a way of thinking that leads Corbin to assert:
‘It is a metaphysics that is not expressed in concepts; it is expressed essentially in *images* – sumptuous, baroque, dazzling, nostalgic; there are all manner of them. (…) Rûzbehân’s thought and perceptions are essentially those of the *imaginal*, which in no way means *imaginary*, any more than the ‘imaginal’ world is an ‘imaginary’ world. The *Malakût* is the realm of

theophanic visions, of *malakûtî* forms[482].”

Thus, this *malakûtî* vision entails a transfiguration of the senses, enabling one to see, feel and perceive all things through the eye of the heart. And it is because Rûzbehân thinks in images that his language is eminently symbolic. Corbin frequently returned in his writings to the fundamental distinction that must be made between the *symbol* and *the allegory*. This distinction is essential for him, because it lies at the heart of what distinguishes mystical thought from rationalist thought. Thus, allegory ‘is a rational operation, involving no transition either to a new plane of being or to a new depth of consciousness: it is the representation, at the same level of consciousness, of that which may already be very well known in another way[483]’. The symbol, on the other hand, operates on a different level; “it is the ‘cipher’ of a mystery, the sole means of expressing what can be apprehended in another way; it is never ‘explained’ once and for all, but must always be deciphered anew, just as a musical score is never deciphered once and for all, but calls for an ever-new performance[484]”.

The organ of this symbolic perception is the active imagination, and this blossoms only at the level of the *imaginal*; it is therefore ‘the privileged exemplification of e archetype [485]’. Moreover, the concepts derived from the Arabic root of the word ‘mithâl’ (symbol) lend themselves perfectly to this. *Tamthîl* is not allegorisation but typification, or if you will, ‘the exemplification of an archetype’, of an archetype that recounts an event experienced by the soul. As for the connotations of ‘tamaththol’, ‘it is the state of the sensible or imaginal thing that possesses this investiture of the archetype, and this investiture, by making it symbolise the archetype, elevates it to its maximum meaning[486] …’.

“Transforming the sensible into a symbol and returning the symbol to the situation that gives rise to it: ‘these two movements open and close the hermeneutic circl e [487]’.” And it is within this very circle that a Rûzbehân thinks in *images*, because his entire visionary endeavour remains *suspended* between these two movements of the hermeneutic circle, which is related to the double meaning of amphiboly (*iltibâs*).

CHAPTER II
The Clouding
and the trial of the veil

It is not enough to place Rûzbehân between Hallâj (to whom we owe the preservation of the sole extant text of Hallâj's work) and Ibn 'Arabî in order to define his person and his doctrine. He differs from earlier Sufis in rejecting an asceticism that would set human love against divine love; he experiences both as two forms of one and the same love. There is no transfer from a human 'object' to a divine 'object', but rather a metamorphosis, a transfiguration of the subject. This emphasis on human love as an initiation into divine love bears, says Corbin, the deep mark of Iranian Sufism; 'it characterises those whom, following Rûzbehân, we designate as the faithful of love, to distinguish them from the pious devotees or the ascetic devotees (*zohhâd*)[488] '. Thus, despite the similarities between this religion of love and *'odhrit* love *e*[489] , Rûzbehân's approach is different. Unlike certain Sufis who fear that human love might compromise transcendence, Rûzbehân values humanity as a divine epiphanic form and a mirror of God's beauty. "Only human love bridges the two abysses, and it leads to their crossing when it realises that this form of beauty which draws it is precisely the theophanic form par excellence[490] ."

At the heart of the doctrine lies a fundamental intuition that traces back to the cosmogony of the Hidden Treasure (an idea found in most Sufi masters) which yearns to be known and creates the world in order to be known and to know itself through its creatures.

The first figure in Rûzbehân's cosmogony is neither the Prime Intelligence, as in the Avicennian philosophers, nor the Breath of the Compassionate (*Nafas al-Rahman*), as in Ibn 'Arabî, but *the Spirit*. It is through this founding Spirit that the *arwâh-e qodsî* (the Holy Spirits) come into being, that is to say, the 'pre-eternal spiritual individualiti s[491]' which together constitute the community of the Holy Spirits. And it is through them that the *veils* are created, which are like so many Trials that they must remove on the path of return. But in establishing the Veil, the divine Being then feels jealousy towards itself. 'By objectifying itself, by revealing itself, it *is* no longer identically its own witness to itself; it *has* a witness outside itself, one *other* than itself. And this is the first Veil. Thus the Divine Being seeks to reclaim itself; it diverts this Spirit from contemplating It, and sends its creature back to contemplate itself. This vision of itself by itself is the second Veil. The trial of the Veil is the very meaning of Creation: the descent of the Holy Spirits into the earthly condition has no other purpose than to lead them to the victorious outcome of this trial[492]."

However, it is not a question of seeking God beyond the Veil, for in doing so, says Rûzbehân, one will fall into the 'madness of the inaccessible', but rather of ensuring that the veil becomes a *mirror*. To transform the veil into a mirror is also to be *a witness*; it is to be 'the eyes through which God still looks upon the world, and thereby also still "concerns" it[493]'.

And all witnesses are, in the final analysis, the *eyes* of God contemplating Himself. Such are the prophets, the faithful of love. "Without these eyes, God would not see the world, for the world is that which has no *eyes*, and without this gaze the world could not subsist[494]."

The veil is, moreover, *the clouding of the heart*. In *The Book of Clouding* (**Kitâb al-Ighâna**), Rûzbehân draws inspiration from the words attributed to the Prophet: ‘There *is a cloud* over my heart, and truly I ask God for forgiveness seventy times a day. ” This statement is supplemented by another: “For the prophets and the *Awliyâ* there is the clouding of mysteries (*ighânat al-asrâr*) and the veiling of lights. And this is the trial by which God tests them[495].”

Rûzbehân examines the seventy veils which mystics must overcome; there are the veils that must be overcome by the Angel, the one whom the prophet must cast aside, the one over whom the Friend of God must triumph. There are veils corresponding to each degree, to each stage of the mystical hierarchy. In short, the veil is that which causes the *gaze* to be diverted, everything that prevents the eye from transforming the veil into a transparent mirror of beauty. God cannot look upon an opaque world, devoid of transparency, for wherever He turns, wherever He looks, ‘He can look only upon His own eyes which look upon Him t[496]’. But man attains this transparency of the veil only through the ‘vision of the vision’ (*kashf ’iyân al-’iyân*).

Here is an excerpt describing this triumphant outcome, as recounted by Rûzbehân in her **Jasmine**:

‘I became strong enough to sail upon the ocean of mystical gnosis (…). I reached the shores of the Attributes of divine operation; gradually, through the high knowledge leading to unification (*tawhîd*), individuation (*tafrîd*) and immaterialisation (*tajrîd*), I made my way towards the universe of pre-eternity. (…) The Divine Being placed me beside him; He stripped me of the garment of servitude to clothe me in the condition of a free man, then He said to me: ‘Behold, this is what you have become: a faithful lover, a lover, a friend, a being of desire, a free man of daring paradoxes (*shattâh*), a gnostic, a being of beauty (…). Well then! Be a creator through my own creative act, contemplate through my own gaze, listen through my own hearing, speak through my own utterance, (…) love through my love. For you are numbered among my Friends (*Awliyâ*) (…). Having returned from the celestial world, what I experienced in this world were the very conditions of the trial (…). *And suddenly, at the edge of the Square of Munificence, in the mirror of the signs* (âyât) *of beauty, I perceived the Divine Attribut s*[497] . (…) With the eyes of the heart I contemplated uncreated beauty; with the eyes of the intellect, I sought to understand the secret of the human form.

“She herself said to me: ‘Behold, then, the world of man through the eyes of a human being.’ The eyes of my heart then placed the eyes of my body at their service. And lo and behold, I saw before me a beautiful and charming fairy, whose grace and beauty surrendered all the beings of this world to the power of love. Oh! That young, impious, tender, mischievous, charming, playful, impulsiv e[498] ! »

All of Rûzbehân’s major themes are more or less brought together in this text. The idea of sovereign freedom, of the lover’s devotion, and of daring paradoxes. The union of the Contemplator and the Contemplated, where the mystic ultimately unites with God and loves only through the love of the divine itself; the descent into the sensible world and the discovery of human beauty as a theophany of divine beauty; and the reflections of divine Beauty in the mirror of *signs*. Rûzbehân then describes the mystic’s multidimensional gaze; his eye participates in all levels of reality, and whilst the gaze of the soul contemplates the mirror of beauty, the eyes of the intellect perceive the masterpiece that embodies that very beauty. Then the reversal takes place, and the eyes of the heart take the eyes of the body into their service, and behold, *feminine* beauty appears, perceived through the transformed eyes of the soul and those of the spirit. And this beauty reveals the ambivalent qualities of the human form, which is by turns impious, tender, mischievous, charming, and a mirror-witness. These paradoxical aspects constitute the very secret of amphiboly in Rûzbehân.

CHAPTER III
The Inner Pilgrimage

According to Corbin, the themes marking the stages of Rûzbehân's inner pilgrimage comprise six stages: 1. Divine theophany as Divine Beauty within man; 2. Muhammad is the prophet par excellence of the religion of love; 3. The prophetic meaning of this beauty is revealed to the one who unveils amphiboly, or the phenomenon of the mirror; 4. The pre-existential foundation of love is the primordiality of the Holy Spirits (pre-existing human individualities); 5. Realising the prophetic meaning is equivalent to transforming the veil into a mirror as *shâhid-mashhûd* (the Contemplator-Contemplated); this is also a transition from metaphorical love (*majâzî*) to true (*haqîqî*); 6. At its apotheosis, human love leads to the secret of esoteric *tawhîd* (oneness). It is God Himself who is love, the lover and the beloved. 'And there ends the "story" of the faithful in love[499].'

1) Theophany as Divine Beauty in Man

Among all human experiences, there is one that holds a special place, for it is linked to the very reason for divine theophany: it is the experience of human love for a being of beauty. This is, of course, not a love conditioned by possessive desires, but a love which, whilst reflecting itself on the face of a being of beauty, transfigures it and makes it a transparent *mirror*.

But love, at its origin, is an act of contemplation: 'When God, through love and inclination, makes of his faithful one the Desirer and the Desired, the Lover or the Beloved, this servant of love assumes towards God the role of Witness-of-contemplation (*shâhid*). (…) As long as, in love, you do not become identical with the Beloved, it is impossible for you to become one with the Beloved in the hermitage of attainment[500] ."

Divine love is therefore the secret of theophany, just as it is the motive for anthropomorphosis. "Adam," says Rûzbehân, "is God Himself having donned the garment of being (*libâs-e hastî*) and assuming human form (that is to say, undergoing anthropomorphosis)[501] ."

This theophany thus passes through the successive veils of the Intellect, the Heart and physical nature, , which are all stages of clouding. However, this theophanic manifestation 'is by no means an incarnatio n[502] '. For incarnation leads the lover astray; it prevents him from overcoming the obstacle and perceiving the image in the mirror. It confuses human eros with carnal sexuality. The image is not incarnated in the mirror, but by appearing there '… it sees and shows to himself the one who looks into the mirror and of whom it *is* the image ' [503]. Deprived of the theophanic feeling, one never manages to experience love as Rûzbehân does. And Rûzbehân himself encountered this obstacle. Indeed, he admits as much: 'He did not yet understand that this event takes place outside the human clay, without there being anything like a material penetration of the divine Attributes within the boundaries of the created world!… ' Had he known this, he says, 'with the dew of tears from the sorrow of love, he would have wiped away the dust of the ephemeral from the face of the eternal Bride[504] '.

To wipe away the dust, then, is to recognise and perceive the theophany as a Docetist form, as an image in suspension, not materialised in any epiphany. This amounts to

to avoid both incarnationism and idolatry, for ‘the Eternal Bride initiates her *faithful* lover into love by filtering for him the pure drink of love, leaving no trace of any impure material mixture of divinity with humanity, yet softening the features of her sublimity so that her beauty may be bearable to a human being, through that sweetly scented tincture to which this verse alludes: ‘We have created man in the best of forms’[505] ”.

Corbin has often contrasted theophanic forms with incarnation in his writings. Incarnation, being a unique and irreversible event, is woven into the fabric of material reality: God himself becomes incarnate at a specific moment in history. And this event becomes a point of reference. Theophany, on the other hand, presupposes another level of being where forms appear like images in a mirror. We therefore need a world that ontologically underpins these suspended forms. In short, a world in which the real essence of human beauty—and not its *idol*—appears transfigured within its real halo (like an *icon*). Just as the Incarnation implies the phenomenon of history beginning from a identifiable point, so too does *theophany* presuppose a hiero-history of events in Heaven, appearing within the imaginal space of the soul. It is not the bodily eyes of the witnesses that contemplate this ‘theophany in history’; it is the organ of their heavenly sight (*chashm-e malakûtî*) that contemplates it ‘in Heaven’ as *caro spiritualis*. ‘And because it is an “event in Heaven”, not a material fact irreversibly entered into history, the theophany repeats itself as many times as there are *shâhid* in the present, faces of beauty imbued with their prophetic meaning. Being neither *enoïkesis* (*holûl*, immanence) nor ensarkôsis (*tajassod*, incarnation), it is not, either, a *kenôsis*, an exhaustion or effacement of the divine, but a triumphant manifestation, resplendent in majesty, of the divine attribute par excellence, which is Beauty[506] .”

The whole secret of *the Jasmine* lies in guiding love from its human form to its divine form, in perceiving, in the mirror of human Beauty, the Celestial Image, as it appears in the act of theophany, without confusing it either with the materiality of the incarnationists (*holûlîyân*) or with the likeness of the polytheists (*moshrikân*). And once this transition is complete, the Lover, Love and the Beloved become one in the supreme secret of *tawhîd*, so that the subject itself is transformed to become, like Majnûn, the ‘Mirror of God’. Now it is God Himself who, in the Beloved’s gaze for the Lover, contemplates His own eternal face. And the Lover is but the eye through which the Beloved contemplates Himself.

2) Muhammad, prophet of the religion of love

Beauty is the radiant manifestation of the divine attribute par excellence. The devotees of love say, and never cease to repeat: ‘God is beautiful, and He loves beauty.’ It is because He is beautiful that He loves to reveal Himself; and it is because He is beautiful that there is love, and a desire to unite with the person whose beauty inspires love. The rejection of beauty by certain forms of asceticism is a betrayal and sacrilege on the part of man, for in doing so, one drives God out of paradise, since beauty is the very essence of paradise. It is this worship of beauty that will set Rûzbehân, and later Ibn ’Arabî, at odds with the pious devotees, and with all those whose spiritual premises have remained alien to the beauty of human love. Beauty is the essential attribute of God, and it is the Prophet Muhammad who is its epiphany as *the* celestial *anthropos*.

Mohammad is thus the prophet of divine anthropomorphism, of the revelation of God’s beauty in man. This charism sets him apart from all the prophets who came before him. His personal mystical experience places him as the quintessential prototype of all visionary experience. Rûzbehân would say that when the Prophet ‘had seen with the eyes of the soul the imprint of the Beloved in the

mirror that is Adam by his very substance, then he announced to the Holy Spirits (*arwâh-e qodsî*, the spiritual individualities of men), with the emphasis of a triumphant voice: *'God created Adam in the image of His own form e*[507]'

All the traits Rûzbehân attributes to him attest to this privileged position of the prophet of love. He assumes the role of the archangel Michael and invites the angels to worship the human form[508] ; he enjoys all the tenderness of the Beloved: when he sees a rose, he brings it to his eyes, saying: 'The red rose belongs to the beauty of God. " Beauty is inherent in his very nature; that is why he is called a "second Adam[509] ".

Mohammad is thus the prophet of *Eros* divi n[510] .

Abraham's state was not yet that of the vision of human beauty; it was a matter of faith. The 'three declinants' (Sun, Moon, Venus) are the signs of faith[511] . Likewise, the vision was denied to Moses: 'Thou shalt not see me (*lan tarânî*). ' Consequently, this ocular vision, which is the epiphany of the Essence (*majlâ-e dhât*), was reserved for him who was the Seal of the Prophets s [512], that is to say, Muhammad, the herald of the prophetic meaning of the religion of the faithful of love.

Mohammad is, moreover, the prophet who heralds the 'mystical death of love', the attainment of true love in which one becomes not only an eyewitness (*shâhid*) but also *a martyr* (*shahîd*)[513]. The lover who attains this fidelity of love becomes the partner of the prophets, but since beauty itself has a prophetic function, any lover who makes this transition becomes both a faithful lover and *a nabî*. Elevated to this supreme rank, prophets and faithful lovers are bound by the same bond of witness. " When love has elevated the lover to the rank of True Witness (*shâhid*), he becomes the partner of the prophets in the world of *Jabarût* and in the arenas of *Malakût*, riding with them on the steed of love, for the royal path is the place (*mashâhid*) where martyrs are slain and where the prophets bear witness s[514] . »

To attain the rank of witness and martyr is to experience and reach the level of esoteric *tawhîd* which is the central pillar of the religion of Love and the apotheosis of all mystical quests.

3) Amphiboly or the phenomenon of the mirror

Rûzbehân's entire journal is 'a series of variations on the theme of the amphiboly (*iltibâs*) of the human Image, which both "is" and "is not". Everything that is perceptible, visible and audible is amphiboly, has a double meaning, since it reveals the invisible and the inaudible, and this is precisely the theophanic function of the beauty of creatures, without contradiction with the stripping away of pure Essence (*tanzîh*)[515] .

Amphiboly deepens a fundamental ambiguity rooted in the essential paradox of existence itself. Just as every theophany is a veil which, whilst revealing being, nonetheless conceals the dimension of that which remains hidden, so too does language convey this ambivalence through inspired paradoxes. Every paradox has a double meaning that simultaneously veils and reveals the invisible, just as the mirror showing the image that appears in it refers to what lies beyond that image. 'Once,' says Rûzbehân, 'in the second part of the night, after sitting on the prayer mat in anticipation of the appearance of the Invisible Brides (*'arâ'is al-ghayb*), my secret consciousness took flight into the realms of *the Malakût*, and I beheld the divine majesty, in the station of amphiboly, on several occasions, in the luminous aspect (*hayba*) of its beauty! My heart was not content with this, yearning to discover the eternal majesty that sets the secrets of consciences and thoughts ablaze. Behold, I beheld a Face vaster than the sum of the Heavens, the Earth, the Throne and the *Kursi*. From it radiated the lights of Beauty; it transcended every notion of likeness or similarity. However, I

“I perceived her beauty as resembling a red rose, yet like a world within a world, as if red roses were pouring forth from it, and I could see no end to it. My heart then recalled these words of our Prophet: ‘The red rose is part of divine beauty’[516].”

Here Rûzbehân penetrates the mystery of amphiboly as a theophany that transcends all things, which provokes wonder and which at the same time appears in the guise of a red *flower*. There is therefore, on the one hand, the form of the attributes (*symbols*) that reflect its beauty, such as the human form and the red rose; and, on the other hand, the stripping away of the pure essence, which, whilst transcending any reduction to any object whatsoever, does not, however, remain in contradiction with this manifestation, which is also a symbolisation.

Hence a first consequence: *amphiboly* presupposes a *transfiguration* which is the point of junction of this double meaning; it lies at the very threshold of the passage leading from duality (opposing the divine Lord and his beloved) to the state of theophanic union, where the relationships are reversed. The devotee now perceives all things through the transfiguring gaze of love: in this way, he realises the ‘ocular vision (*shohûd*) of the Divine Face in a form beautiful to behold, in the person of a human creature with a beautiful face[517]’

The lover who has attained true love remains at the very point where these two meanings converge: through amphiboly, he perceives the human face *transfigured* by the divine Face, and it is with this new gaze that he rediscovers the human face, so that the Lover, the Beloved and the bond of love uniting them become homochromatic (*hamrang*). This is not because ‘his eyes would close to the external and visible form of the Beloved and turn away from it, but in the sense that the Lover thus arrives at the inner discovery of love (*kashf-e ’ishq*)… It becomes clear to him that it is the Divine Being who reveals Himself to him in the beauty of the Belov é [518] ”.

But for the veil to be lifted and transformed into a mirror, for Beauty to reveal itself whilst concealing itself and to conceal itself whilst revealing itself in the very double sense of *the symbol*, this vision must remain at an equal distance from a double pitfall: the anthropomorphism of the idolaters and the uncompromising abstractionism of *the iconoclasts*. For whilst *the idol* reduces the Essence to a particular attribute and monotheism separates it from it forever, *the icon*, on the other hand, preserves both the many and the One, the image and the mirror; and that which lies beyond the mirror remains hidden.

a) The confusion between ta’tîl and tashbîh

The mystery of *amphiboly* is summed up in this phrase often repeated by the Sufis: ‘I have seen my God in the most beautiful of forms.’ This testimony resolves the contradiction between anthropomorphism (*tashbîh*) and abstract monotheism (*ta’tîl*), between immanence and transcendence. God remains God whilst taking on the most beautiful of forms. He is neither associated with the theophanic form of which He is the transcendent reality, nor isolated outside any theophanic connection with the world. He is and He is not; He reveals Himself and conceals Himself; and it is by settling into the very heart of this ambivalence that the lover becomes, like *Majnûn* (the prototype of Love), the mirror of God, that is to say, the man with *the theophanic gaze* (*sâhib-e nazar*)[519] .

Moreover, this ambiguity can only be overcome at the risk of foundering either in metaphysical idolatry or in the abstraction of indeterminate essence. It is only by saving the *phenomenon*, by *transfiguring* the world, that one transcends it, thereby avoiding the peril that befell Moses on the mountain[520] .

‘Behold,’ said Rûzbehân, ‘I saw Him (God) endowed with Majesty and Beauty, dwelling abode, *in the most beautiful of forms*. I felt a longing, a love, a desire, each intensifying the other. During my state of ecstasy, all matters of *tashbîh* and *ta’tîl* were banished from my heart,

for in His presence the standards of intellects and knowledge crumble[521].”

The dual rejection of *tashbîh* and *ta’tîl* involves neither sacrificing the One to the many, nor reducing the One to the many. It is by moving between the one and the other with equal proximity that the soul achieves its distance from both; and thus it attains the station of love and, in so doing, substitutes the ontological unity (*tawhîd wojûdî*) of the faithful in love for the theological unity of the literalists. It is almost with exasperation that Rûzbehân rails against the *foqahâ’* (theologians) of the legalistic religion who, being blind, see nothing but association (*shirk*) and incarnation (*tajassod*) everywhere. He says: ‘Although this pearl (that is to say, the pearl of contemplation attached to *the shâhid*) has the purity of a jewel, the hypocrites of the legalistic religion and the small-minded of devout life perceive in it a form of incarnation. Good heavens! If those who have eyes cannot see, what will become of those who have no eyes at al x[522] . ’ This attack on the censors and religious prohibitors so characteristic of Iranian Sufism already foreshadows the even more vehement tone with which, two centuries later, Hafez, Iran’s famous lyrical-mystical poet, would uncompromisingly challenge the hypocrites of legalistic religion. Corbin frequently returns to the affinity between Rûzbehân and Hâfez, and even more so to the possible affiliation of the great poet of Shîrâz with the Rûzbehânian order. Moreover, Rûzbehân’s commentator quotes two stanzas by Hâfez and two others by Sa’dî (two famous poets of Shîrâz, like Rûzbehân himself) to illustrate the ephemeral nature of visionary phenomena. Hâfez says: ‘To everyone’s gaze our idol appears, and yet! This allure that I behold, none but I can see it.’ To which this couplet by Sa’dî responds in antistrophe: ‘It is not fitting that any gaze should behold such beauty – save for you who draw around yourself the protective circle of the Divine Name n[523] .’

4) From metaphorical love to true Love

Let us briefly summarise the dialectic of Love. Creation is a theophany; it is also the manifestation of divine beauty in human form. Furthermore, from pre-eternity there has been *a unio mystica* and affinity (*ta’alof*) between divinity and humanity. It is this theophanic relationship that underpins the revelation of divine love in human love because, when brought to its ultimate limit, the latter is none other than God’s love for Himself.

Furthermore, the ultimate goal of human love, which is also esoteric unity (*tawhîd wojûdî*), can only be attained through human love. It is this particular trait that so clearly distinguishes the spirituality of a Rûzbehân not only from that of ‘the Christian ascetic in general, but also from that of those Sufis in Islam whom Rûzbehân designates as the “pious ascetics” (*zohhâd*) in contrast to the faithful of [love524]’. That is to say, all those for whom human beauty is a temptation of the flesh, a trap. On this very path, Rûzbehân does not shy away from appearing as a *malâmatî*, as one of those who, in order to conceal the purity of their inner self, occasionally adopt behaviour that invites official censure. From this perspective, he may be regarded as the precursor of the famous poet Hafez of Shiraz, whose *Divan* is still consulted as a mystical memento[525] .

The originality of Iranian Sufism lies here: ‘It involves,’ says Corbin, ‘a challenge and an ethic individual, heroic and secret, epitomised in the figure of *the Javânmard*, the knight of the soul. For Rûzbehân, as for Ahmad Ghazâlî, Fakhr ’Erâqî and Hâfez, it is one and the same love. As [Rûzbehân] writes: “It is but one and the same love, and it is in the book of human love (*’ishq insânî*) that one must learn to read the rule of divine love (*’ishq rabbânî*)”. It is therefore one and the same text, but one must learn to read it; here, par excellence, the exegesis of the text reveals itself to be the exegesis of the soul (…) ; one must be initiated into a spiritual hermeneutics, into a *ta’wîl* of

love [526] …’

Now, the *ta’wîl* of love is also, as we said earlier, the trial of the veil, or of obscurity. This veil is the hermeneutics of love that leads to the *transparency of the mirror*, that is to say, the triple mirror of the heart (*sirr*) which contemplates the invisible, the *mirror* of the transfigured inner senses which contemplates the apparent, the visible form of God, and the mirror of human eyes illuminated by love which contemplates the Face of the eternal Bride. The lover’s entire being, by virtue of this alchemical metamorphosis, becomes mirrors in which the invisible, the apparent and the Face of the Beloved are reflected simultaneously; and all this in the appearance of a suspended image that characterises the amphiboli e [527].

At this stage of union, the roles *are reversed*. ‘This is the point at which the hero of Love, Majnûn realises that he himself has become the Beloved Layla; he has internalised her so completely, identified with her so fully, that when asked his name, he replies ‘Layla’. Far from there being any opposition between human Eros and divine love, the latter can only be discovered and experienced within the [former528] .”

Ruzbehani’s conception of love—that of the transition from human love to divine love—is possible only where thought transforms all flesh into *caros spiritualis*, all sensory data into symbols, and every veil into a mirror of contemplation. In short, Love must become the *Mirror of God*.

5) From exoteric *tawhîd* to esoteric *tawhîd*

The transition from human love to divine love is also, viewed from an ontological perspective, akin to the transition from *the* exoteric *tawhîd* (unity) of monotheistic faith to *the* esoteric *tawhîd* of the spiritual vision. Just as, through Love, Majnûn internalises Layla so as to see nothing but her Image in the mirror of his heart, so too does the transition to esoteric unity presuppose a return to a state prior to the subject-object opposition; a state in which it is the Subject itself that becomes both the Lover and the Beloved.

Rûzbehân distinguishes three degrees of *tawhîd* in his Persian treatise entitled *Risâla-ye Qodsîya*. According to Corbin’s comments, the three levels of *tawhîd* are as follows[529]:

1) There is a first level known as *the* ‘general *tawhid*’ (*tawhîd-e ’âmm*); this is the abstract monotheism held by the naive and common consciousness. It presupposes a Supreme Being (*Ens supremum*) transcending all other beings. It therefore proceeds by negation (*tanzîh*). Separating the divine from all categories of the created world whilst preserving its transcendence. ‘The totality of beings gathered on an egalitarian plane, kept equidistant from the transcendent object by its totalitarian demand, could be represented by a notation such as n + 1. For Sufism, as for Ismailism, the *tawhîd* of the common ceaselessly commits metaphysical idolatry[530]…’

2) The *tawhid* of the elite (*tawhid-e khass*) is a particular unity in which the totality of beings is subsumed into the essential theophany of the One Being. It is a state of annihilation (*fana*) which entails only the sole existence of God and the negation of everything other than Him. It thus substitutes for the + 1 of common *tawhid* with the metaphysical identity of 1 = 1. In this context, appearances—theophanies—prove to be illusory constructs capable of vanishing into the primordial annihilation of divine Selfhood. Whilst common *tawhid* moves from the world to God (*az ’âlam-e molk be Haqq*), the second moves from the personal self to God (*az khod be Haqq*), whilst the third moves from God to God (*az Haqq be Haqq*).

Corbin explains: whilst the *tawhîd* of the first degree can be represented graphically by n + 1, and the *tawhîd* of the second degree by 1 = 1, Rûzbehân has already suggested to us the notation corresponding to the third degree, stating: ‘As long as it does not become the product of unity by unity (*wâhid dar wâhid* 1 × 1),

The mystical pilgrim does not attain the vision of the vision of *tawhîd* (…). This was a rigorous formulation of the relationship between unity and the multiplicity of theophanies, as it is verified in *each instance, kath'héna*, to yield the product of unity in itself, of the same gaze multiplying itself, unity of unity, *vision of the vision*, because the Contemplated is *in each instance* the very gaze of the Contemplator t[531] ." Corbin, interpreting elsewhere the passage from theological unity to ontological unity in Haydar Amolî, arrives at the same conclusion. Ontological unity is the level of the integration of integration (*jam' al-jam'*), just as it is in Rûzbehân the unity of the elite of the elite. One must therefore move from the undifferentiated Whole back to the differentiated whole. This is the integral vision possessed by the Sage: 'an integral vision of the One God and the manifold divine forms. One sees both the forest and the trees, and the ink and the letters… ' [532].

3) This is the *tawhîd* of the elite of the elite (*tawhîd-e khâss-e khâss*). It undoes the second annihilation brought about by the second *tawhîd*. It is the re-emergence of all forms following the initial erasure of metaphysical identity.

But it is precisely here that the reversal takes place of which we spoke in connection with the transition from human love to divine love. From now on, the high becomes the low and the low becomes the high. At this level, the mystic sees everything, but perceives it through the eye of God; he himself is the alchemical gaze of God, which transfigures all things into its own vision. With the self and ego having faded away, he is a mirror in which divine selfhood is reflected: having been annihilated (his self erased) in the annihilating essence of the Majesty, he reappears through the eternal existence (*baqâ'*) of God. He sees God through God without himself (*bî-khod Haqq râ be Haqq bînad*). He certainly sees, and yet it is not he who sees. It is God who sees *through him*. He is the eye through which God contemplates Himself. This is what is meant, moreover, by: 'the above has become the below', and conversely: 'He knows that this is a step from non-being to being. The second step takes him out of the servile human condition (*bandagî*) onto the wing of the lordly divine condition (*robûbîyat*) into the free space of divine Selfhood (*howîyat*)[533] .'

This is the secret of *tawhîd*. It is, in terms of the science of the gaze, the Vision of vision (*'iyân al-'iyân*); in terms of the eyewitness, the merging of the witness and the witnessed (*shâhid* and *mashhûd*); and in terms of the archetype that embodies it, the state of divine madness epitomised by *Majnûn*.

a) Vision of vision

When your own gaze is the eye through which God contemplates Himself, then you are in the state of the vision of the vision. For man's vision of the world is the very same as that perceived by the divine gaze. Thus this vision presupposes an *ek-statis*, a stepping outside of oneself. A departure admirably expressed by Rûzbehân's paradox *'man bar man bî man 'âsheqam*': 'It is I myself who, without myself (that is to say, outside of myself), am the lover of myself. ' A supreme paradox that also sums up the entire ambiguity of the science of the gaze. The gaze that the lover contemplates in the mirror is his own gaze; and yet it is not him, since it is the gaze of the other, and yet this other is, in the final analysis, none other than himself. *Vision of vision* and the mystery of that which is and is not, and yet is and is not at the same time, and which ultimately remains suspended between being and non-being. It is this level of *vision of vision* that, moreover, attests to Hallâj's famous paradox: 'I am God.' Rûzbehân explains:

"When you have attained the vision of the vision, every atom of your being proclaims: 'I am God'. ' For then every atom of creation is an eye of God u[534] . But if all *atoms* are the eyes of God, the reason is that the acts of creation too are divine contemplations (*nazarât*). In fact, all categories of creation are not objects distinct from God, but the very organs

of its creation. Every creation constitutes a divine *eye*, for without this organ of sight nothing could have come into being. And it is in this sense that every creation is a theophany. In the state of the vision of vision, a coalescence occurs such that, says Rûzbehân, 'the coalescence of *the gaze* (…) of the Lover and the gaze (…) of the Beloved is implied in the *gaze* of coalescence (*'ayn-e jam'*) which is the essence of love[535] '. This is a homochromatic (*hamrang*) state, co-natural between the Lover and the Beloved, a *symmorphosis* or *synchromatism e* [536], says Corbin, through which the mystical lover contemplates the eye that contemplates him as if he were that eye himself.

b) Witness of Contemplation

The concept of 'the vision of the vision' is linked to another notion which is itself a key term in **The Book of Boredom** and which is frequently used in *The Book of *Jasmine**. This is the term **Shâhid**. Here is how Corbin interprets it: 'The root from which it derives conveys the idea of witnessing an event in person and bearing witness to what one has seen. Hence *Shâhid* is to be translated sometimes as "*the one* who is *present*", "the one who contemplates", and sometimes as "witness" n[537] . ' In every theophany there is a reversibility of relationships, such that the witness of any Image perceived in a mirror thereby becomes a 'witness-of-contemplation' (Contemplator-Contemplated). The witness (*Shâhid*) is no longer the *other* eye that looks at God, but the eye through which God looks and reveals Himself to Himself in the infinite variations that are His contemplated forms (*mashhûd*). Moreover, the inversion of this reciprocity, which constitutes, as we have seen, the third degree of *tawhîd* (the vision of the vision), reveals, through the paradoxes it brings into play, the secret of *the amphiboly* which is, in a sense, the keystone of Rûzbehân's entire visionary edifice. Let us hear him speak again: 'The *shâhid* is He, and the *mashhûd* is He. He sees Himself through Himself, since no one actually sees Him… The *shâhid* is He, and the *mashhûd* are the hearts of the mystics in whom He is present (…). And the *shâhid* are also the hearts of the mystical lovers, whilst their *mashhûd* is to have Him face to face. He is their *shâhid* and He is their *mashhû d*[538] …"

c) Majnûn, Mirror of God

Majnûn is much more than a model. He is the 'Mirror of God'. Majnûn's Being has become the eye (*dîdeh-hastî*) through which God beholds Himself. "He could not say, as he does: 'I am Layla', had he not become this mirror[539]." Majnûn knows that he cannot cross "the torrential river (the Jayhûn) of *tawhîd* without the bridge of your love". But to cross this bridge is to make the transition from human love to divine love, through which the lover's heart becomes the mirror in which God's eye beholds itself, since He has revealed Himself there in the incomparable beauty of the Beloved, Layla. Crossing this bridge is not, either, a transfer from a human object to a divine object; "it is to undergo such a metamorphosis that the very notion of an object is overturned[540]".

It is because of the perfect internalisation of the Beloved Layla within the Lover that Majnûn sees nothing but the Beloved; for, being a perfect mirror, he exists only insofar as he reveals the Image of the Beloved. He sees her reflection everywhere: in a mountain, a flower. Layla is, in a sense, the Image through which the world appears to him transfigured in the halo of pure beauty. This goes so far that Majnûn avoids Layla's physical presence *for fear that it might distance him from his love.* It is because of this total absorption in the internalised presence of the Beloved that the Sufi masters, Shiblî for example (861–945 AD), present in their visions 'Majnûn as the model of the true mystic whose consciousness is so utterly absorbed by God that he knows not himself—

‘and perceives the outside world only through God’. And that is the whole story of the love between *Majnûn and Layla*.

CHAPTER IV
Inspired paradoxes

The word *shat h*[541], plural *shathîyat*, has been translated as ‘excesses’ or ‘ecstatic utterances’. Louis Massignon had proposed translating it as ‘theopathic utterances’. All these equivalents are, according to Corbin, more or less accurate, but they do not cover the full scope of the situation Rûzbehân is referring to. The reason is that the reported utterances were not spoken in ecstasy but in a state of perfect composure, and that they describe, above all, a vision related to amphiboly. They are, in a sense, the verbal expression of a situation which, ontologically, remains the ambiguity of being and non-being at the same time.

Thus, for Sarrâj, the strange expressions used by mystics in ecstasy bewilder the listener. For in truth, the speaker of these paradoxical words resembles a river flowing between banks that are too narrow; he cannot communicate his experience without simultaneously overwhelming and bewildering the one to whom he speaks: ‘the flood of spiritual light overflows into the tongue, and the tongue begins to utter words that listeners perceive as scandalous paradoxes, save for those capable of fathoming their [true]meaning ’[542].

For Rûzbehân, for example, ‘in the language of the Sufis, *shath* arises from the movements that stir the innermost depths of their hearts (*asrâr-e del*). When ecstasy becomes intense within them, and the light of theophany floods even their innermost secret (*sirr*) (…) their soul is set in motion (moved), their innermost depths come to a boil, and their tongue begins to speak. The ecstatic then utters words that spring from the incandescence of his inner state and the exaltation of his spirit, words concerning the sciences relating to the mystical stages, and whose outward appearance (the *zâhir*) is ambiguous (*motashâbih*). (…) People deem these words extravagant, and since in exoteric usage one is unaware of their specific nature, and one cannot see what ‘balance’ weighs their meaning, one succumbs to their provocation by levelling censure and blame against the one who utters them[543] ».

Two *consequences* follow from this text: 1) the paradox has a double meaning, and 2) the one who utters it incurs the blame and censure of the listeners. In other words, he becomes a *malâmatî*. In fact, the paradox appears just as much in the Word of God—that is, in the Holy Book—as in the sayings of the prophets and the ecstatic utterances of the mystics.

The Divine Word necessarily has a *dual meaning*; it is therefore an eminently ambiguous (*motashâbih*), equivocal discourse. If one reduces God to an abstraction, one falls into the trap of abstractionism (*ta’tîl*) and thereby eliminates the inner meaning, which necessarily implies *ta’wîl*, which is, moreover, implicitly contained in every paradox. The *shath* appears wherever the eternal (*qidam*) expresses itself in the temporal (*hadath*). ‘This is then *nothing less* than a symbol[544].’ It is therefore the sole preserve of the seasoned Gnostics, the *râsikhûn fi’l ’ilm*, to decipher it, to unfold its meanings, to bear witness to it. Viewed in this light, the *paradox* fulfils the same amplifying function as spiritual hermeneutics in the reading of sacred texts. Just as the divine word can only be understood and decoded through an act of comprehension that leads back to the hidden meaning behind appearances, so too does the unfolding of the meaning concealed within paradoxes require hermeneutics. It is impossible to separate the two meanings, the apparent and the hidden: appearance is not the true meaning, yet the true meaning can only be indicated through appearance. Whenever the eternal takes on the guise of a

Whatever the statement may be, it undoubtedly becomes ambiguous, that is to say, open to two interpretations.

The apparent meaning becomes shocking, bewildering, scandalous. Moreover, adds Corbin, 'the Greek term *paradoxos* denotes a proposition contrary to conventional wisdom, incredible, scandalous, strange, extravagant, but whose true meaning is hidden beneath this appearance[545]'. This further emphasises the resemblance to the *shath*, as the Arabic root in the second form, *shattaha*, means 'to knock someone to the ground'.

Extended in this way to the meaning of love, the paradox in *Jasmin* becomes the very paradox of love that is

both divine and human, because it is, in essence, one and the same love.

Just as divine Beauty appears transfigured in the mirror of the heart, so too does the inexpressible, the ineffable, appear clothed in paradoxes, which are all the more dazzling for being inspired – that is to say, for springing from the very ambiguity of the mystery of being. This is why Corbin proposes, to translate the *shath*, the equivalent of the 'inspired paradox' to clearly mark the mystical origin of these unusual and extraordinary utterances. "Hermeneutics, the *ta'wîl* of *shath* among the Sufis, does not differ in essence from *the ta'wîl* applied to grasping the spiritual meaning of the Qur'anic Revelation, or that of the words spoken by the Prophet in the *hadîths*, since these are different instances of 'inspired paradoxes'. And this is also why Rûzbehân's book on the *paradoxes* of the Sufis must be studied in conjunction with his great commentary on the Qur'an, as well as with the book *The *Jasmine**, which reflects on the paradox of love[546] ."

1) The *Malâmatî* Sage

The mystic's persona becomes a paradox not merely because he sometimes expresses, in the first person (since his human *ego* has withdrawn), propositions of which only the divine Being can be the subject, but also because this attitude leads him to challenge the exoteric religion of the literalists, and to appear, in the eyes of pious devotees and religious representatives, as an infidel or a desecrator. Just as the amphibolic vision leads the mystic to utter paradoxical statements capable of disturbing the common sense of ordinary people, so too does the man who embodies this status become a *malâmatî*, a sort of inspired libertine (*Rend*, according to Hafez) who, deliberately, in order to conceal the purity of his heart, occasionally adopts scandalous behaviour that incurs official censure. From this perspective, Rûzbehân can be regarded as the precursor to Hâfez, whose *Diwân* the Persians consult in the same way that the Chinese turn to *the Yi Jing*.

Rûzbehân tells us that in his youth he had a *Malâmatî* shaykh. 'In my youth,' he says, 'I had a shaykh. He was a shaykh of great mystical knowledge, perpetually in a state of ecstasy, a *Malâmatî* shaykh, whose true form was unknown to ordinary people. One night I was gazing upon a vast plain in the plains of the Mystery, and behold, I saw God in the likeness of that shaykh, (…). I approached him. Then he beckoned to me, pointing to another plain. I walked towards that plain, and there again I saw a shaykh like him, and that shaykh was God. Once more he beckoned to me, pointing to another plain, and so on until he had revealed *seventy thousand plains* to me, and each time, as I advanced to each plain, I saw a figure similar to the one I had seen in the first. (…) At that moment, I felt within me the hold of the esoteric realities of *Tawhîd*, from the Sea of Magnificence[547]."

In this text, Rûzbehân openly declares his affiliation with the order of *the Malâmatîs*, then associates the vision of his shaykh with the highest degree of *tawhîd*: where he appears as the product of unity multiplied by unity (*wâhid*, 1 × 1). Everything is individual, yet everything is one. This is the integral vision of the One God and the manifold forms, the Vision of the vision and the supreme secret of *amphiboly*. For this relationship between the one and the many, and *vice versa*, is also the mystery of their collusion, a collusion arising from ambiguity

a paradox: the ‘multiplicity of the One and the identity of the Many[548]’. And it is because this *paradox* has flooded the mystic’s heart, soul and vision, and has transfigured the essence of his being, that he becomes, in social terms, a *malâmatî*. That is to say, a fearless soul who, to remain faithful to the complicity he symbolises, fears neither to confront the blissful tranquillity of the unwitting, nor to face the official censure of public institutions. For he is what he is: an *inspired paradox* on the very edge of the ambiguity of being and non-being, and thus a ‘black sheep’ to all right-thinking Muslims. “I was accepted among the Gnostics adorned with the finery of love. But among the pious devotees (*zohhâd*) my story is scandalous impiety e [549].”

To conclude, let us say that Corbin often referred to the affinity between Hafez, the famous of the 14th century, and arguably one of the greatest lyricists and mystics of all time, and the ‘Ruzbehani Sufi order’ (*Tarîqa Ruzbehânîya*). A Turkish commentator on Hafez provides us with a clue to an *isnâd* (chain of transmission) that would make Hafez a member of this order. Whatever the truth of the matter, one thing is certain: the affinity between the two great Shirazi poets, Hafez and Ruzbehân, is undeniable. Unfortunately, we shall not have the opportunity to examine this issue, which merits a study in its own right and lies beyond the scope of this one.

CHAPTER V
Ibn ’Arabî and the creative imagination

Ibn ’Arabî was a writer of immense prolificacy. The catalogue of his works, which we owe to the efforts of Osman Yahia, comprises eight hundred and fifty-six works, of which five hundred and fifty have survived and are attested by two thousand nine hundred and seventeen manuscripts. His best-known masterpiece is the immense work entitled The *Book of Spiritual Conquests of Mecca* (*Kitâb al-Fotûhât al-Makkîya*), the first critical edition of which is still being prepared by Osman Yahia. The work has been read over the centuries by all the spiritual philosophers of Islam. The same can be said of the compendium *The Gems of the Prophets’ Wisdom* (*Fusûs al-Hikam*), which is, rather than a history of the prophets, a speculative meditation contemplating the archetypes of divine Revelation. The work itself belongs to the ‘phenomenon of the Revealed Book’, and Ibn ‘Arabî presents it as having been inspired from Heaven by the Prophet. There are both Sunni and Shia commentaries. Osman Yahia has catalogued one hundred and fifty of these, one hundred and thirty of which are the work of Iranian mystics. This immediately demonstrates the enormous influence of Ibn ’Arabî’s thought in the Iranian world. And when, later on, the theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabî coalesces with the Eastern philosophy (*Ishrâq*) of Sohrawardî, this phenomenon will trigger the great flourishing of Shî‘ite metaphysics in Iran, whose “potential, says Corbin, is far from being exhausted today[550].”

Ibn ’Arabî was born in Murcia, Andalusia, in 560/1165, and died in Damascus in 638/1240. According to Corbin, three key events shaped his life and determined its course: his presence at Averroës’s funeral, his pilgrimage to the East, and his discipleship under *Khidr*.

Let us first summarise the synchronic events that characterised the era of Ibn ‘Arabî. Corbin was acutely attuned to these profoundly significant synchronic events, which, so to speak, weave the fabric of a visionary topography linked to *hierohistory*. This particular era lies at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. It was in the 12th century that Sohrawardî set out to restore the doctrine of the ancient sages of Iran. On 8 August 1164, a year before the birth of Ibn ’Arabî, the Great Ismaili Resurrection was proclaimed at Alamût. In the first year of the 13th century, Ibn ’Arabî was already in Mecca; he was a ‘pilgrim from the East’ who had left the intolerant Almo-hade Andalusia. His religion of love converged with that of Rûzbehân, his elder by several years. Thanks to Ibn ’Arabî’s disciple, Sadr Qonyawî, and the latter’s pupil, Fakr ’Eraqî, his thought penetrated the Iranian world and was received with exceptional enthusiasm. The convergence of his thought with Sohrawardî’s *Ishrâq* and the speculations of Shî’ite thinkers paved the way for the emergence of the Isfahan school under the Safavids. Finally, a fact no less interesting and symbolic: in the 13th century, under Mongol pressure, Sufis from Central Asia retreated to central-western Iran. Among them were the disciples of Najmoddîn Kobrâ[551]. Thus, thanks to all these events, Ibn ’Arabî’s speculative gnosis gradually penetrated the Iranian world and found, without any obstacle, a perfect right of citizenship there. For Corbin, these events unfold in ‘a psychic, discontinuous, purely qualitative time’ where the past remains present in the future, where the future is already present in the past. Hence the recurrences, the reversibilities, the synchronicities that are rationally incomprehensible, eluding historical realism, yet graspable within another realism—that of the subtle world *’âlam al-mithâ’ l*[552] …

These synchronous events herald *two movements in opposite directions*: a journey by Ibn

’Arabî from the West towards the East, and a journey from the Far East of the Islamic world (Central Asia) towards the heart of Iran, the point of *convergence* being the Middle East. And it is within the Iranian world itself that these fusions and cross-fertilisations take place, giving rise to that *synthesis* of gnosis, philosophy and Shi’ism which would make Iran the custodian of an eminently gnostic tradition, whilst in the Islamic West philosophy was lost in the sands after the death of Averroes[553] .

1) The witness at Averroes’s funeral

Averroes died in 595/1198. It has long been considered, and rightly so, that his funeral was also that of Islamic philosophy. For with him came to an end a certain phase of Islamic philosophy that has been termed ‘Arabic Peripateticism’. Yet little attention was paid to the significant fact that Averroes’s death coincided with the emergence of something new: Sohrawardî’s *Ishrâq* and Ibn ’Arabî’s theosophy. These two names are often associated by Corbin, and for good reason: Ibn ’Arabî was given the nickname Ibn Aflâtûn, the ‘son of Plato’. Furthermore, the *Ishrâqîyûn*, disciples of Sohrawardî, are referred to as *Ashâb-e Aflâtûn*, the *Ishrâqîyûn-e Irân*, the
‘Platonists of Persia’. Averroes was born in 1126 and died in 1198; Sohrawardi was born in 1155 in Sohraward (Azerbaijan) and is thought to have died in Aleppo in 1191. Ibn ’Arabî, their younger contemporary, was born in Murcia in 1165 and died in Damascus in 1240. “There was no personal relationship between Sohrawardî and Ibn ’Arabî. However, one after the other, they had the same close friend, al-Malik al-Zahîr, governor of Aleppo and son of Salâheddîn (Saladin)[554] .”

Ibn ’Arabî met Averroës three times, the first time in Córdoba[555] ; the second encounter took place in a dream. Averroës appeared to him in a kind of ecstasy (*wâqi’a*) beneath a light veil[556] . The third encounter is the most decisive: it takes place in the year 595 AH (1198 AD) in Marrakesh. Ibn ’Arabî attends the funeral of the great philosopher. He sees the coffin loaded onto the back of a beast of burden, whilst on the other side his works have been placed to act as a counterweight: ‘On one side the master, on the other his works. Ah! How I would love to know whether his hopes were fulfilled’[557].

For Corbin, this encounter holds symbolic significance. For whilst Averroes’s death holds profound meaning for the Islamic world, it also marks the *death* of a school of thought that sought to restore, in its purest form, a strictly orthodox Aristotelianism. His death also marks a survival in the West since, as we have already seen, this school of thought was to give rise there to Latin Averroism and all the consequences that ensued (the doctrine of double truth). But whilst, according to Renan, Islamic thought was lost in the sands with Averroes, the migration of Ibn ‘Arabî, the son of Plato, to the East and the revival of the Persian Platonists in Iran with Sohrawardî ushered in another form of thought, the convergence and coalescence of which would produce a new phenomenon: theosophy. On the one hand, the triumph of Latin Averroism; on the other, the revival of Avicennism in its *Ishrâqî* form: these are the two destinies—Western and Eastern—of philosophy, and between them lies Ibn ’Arabî’s symbolic journey from Al-Andalus to the East. Here, in broad strokes, is reconstructed, within the context of these two symbolic events, the significance of the work of Ibn ’Arabî, son of Plato.

2) The Pilgrim from the East

Three years after this funeral, another event was to take on symbolic significance in the life of Ibn ‘Arabî. Declining to prolong his stay in Andalusia, the land of his birth, Ibn ‘Arabî set out for the East, with no desire to return.

Just as the expatriate from the Western exile completes his journey home to drink from the Source of Life in the mystical Sinai, so too does the exiled Ibn 'Arabî, the disciple of *Khidr*, yearns to return to the East, that is to say, to the Source of Life, abandoning his earthly homeland, Andalusia. The decisive event of this journey will first be meditation around the Ka'ba, that is to say, the ritual circumambulations around the centre of the world. Long ago, a bird of incomparable beauty had commanded him to set out for the East. This bird, who is the Archangel Gabriel, would be his personal guide, his initiating angel throughout his life. And it is once again around the Temple that Ibn 'Arabî, the visionary, would meet him anew. It is these encounters, all of which took place in the realm of visions, that lie at the origin of the immense Book of *the Futuhat*, the Book of divine revelations received in Mecca. 'These privileged theophanic moments intersect with the continuity of profane time, which is quantified and measurable, but their *tempus discretum* (that of angelology) does not fit within it. This is what must not be lost sight of when linking the theophanies to one another, such as those of the young girl *Sophia* and the mystical youth of *the Fotûhât*[558]."

Ibn 'Arabî was received in Mecca by a noble Iranian family originally from Isfahan. This Persian shaykh had a daughter "who combined the dual gift of extraordinary physical beauty and spiritual wisdom e[559] ". She would be to Ibn 'Arabî what Beatrice was to Dante: that is to say, the perceptible, aesthetic manifestation of the *Sophia Aeterna*. It was to her, in short, that he owed his initiation into the religion of the "Beloved of love " [560]. This encounter illustrates one of Corbin's fundamental insights: "between Andalusia and Iran", which is the first chapter of his book **The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*. From the moment the pilgrim from the East leaves his Western exile to return to his homeland, it is from the East that *sophia* (the young Iranian girl) returns to him in the opposite direction, destined to initiate him into this religion of the 'Believers in Love', the meaning of which Rûzbehân, before him, had unveiled in his inner pilgrimage. This symbolically illustrates the welcome that Persia was to reserve for the thought of Ibn 'Arabî. This is justified by the fact that, whilst from the very beginning the Iranians played an essential part in the flourishing of speculative thought in Islam, it can be said that with the death of Averroes, the centre of gravity of thought shifted definitively from Western Islam (Al-Andalus) to Eastern Islam, in Iran. And it was towards the East that Ibn 'Arabî set out, and it was a young Persian girl who initiated him into the secrets of the Friends of Love. Ibn 'Arabî describes her as someone 'whose very presence adorned the surroundings and filled anyone who beheld her with wonder verging on astonish t [561]'. Her name was Nezâm (*Harmonia*) and her nickname was 'Eye of the Sun and Beauty' (*'ayn al-Shams wa'l-Bathâ'*). Learned and pious, possessing mystical experience… The magic of her gaze was pure enchantment, eloquent, concise, discursive, clear and transparent. ' She inspired him to write love poems, though these poems were incapable 'of expressing even a fraction of the emotion my soul felt and which the company of this young girl stirred in my heart, nor of the generous love I felt, nor of the memory that her constant friendship left in my mind, nor the grace of her spirit and the modesty of her demeanour, since she is the object of my Quest and my hope, the Most Pure Virgin (*al-adhrâ 'al-batûl*)[562] ". She is furthermore associated with 'divine inspirations (*wâridât*), spiritual visitations (*tanazzolât rûhânîya*), correspondences with the world of the Angels…' – followed by a warning lest one misunderstand the nature of her relationships: "May God preserve the reader of this *Dîwân* from any temptation leading them to suppose things unworthy o s [563] …"

Corbin believes that these texts bear witness to the transfiguration of a being perceived directly at the level of the symbol, likened to a theophanic vision 'where she manifests herself as an apparition (*sûrat mithâlîya*) of *Sophia Aetern a*[564]' . But there is more: this young Persian girl is also hailed by Ibn 'Arabî as a *Greek* princess. This new designation suggests to Corbin a

spiritual genealogy, since the young girl is the embodiment (*tamthîl*) of an angel in human form; this is ‘sufficient reason for Ibn ’Arabî to declare her to be of the lineage of Christ, describing her as “Christ-like wisdom” *(hikmat ’isawîya)*, and concluding that she belongs to the world of Rûm, that is to say, to the Greek Christianity of Byzantium[565] ».

We shall see later the enormous significance of Sophia in Ibn ’Arabî’s dialectic of Love, and the repercussions it had on his religion of Love.

3) The disciple of Khezr

In the tale of **The Crimson Archangel** (Sohrawardî), the sage replies to the pilgrim seeking the ‘Source of Life’: ‘If you wish to set out on the Quest for this Source of Life, put on the same sandals as Khezr (*Khadir*)[566] . ’ To put on Khezr’s sandals is to be initiated into the secret that enables one to cross Mount Qâf and reach the Source of Life. And whoever bathes in this Source will be preserved forever from all defilement. Thus Khezr’s role as a personal Guide is consistent with the idea of ‘Perfect Nature’ in Sohrawardî. He is therefore the portion allotted to each individual, their absolute individuality, the divine Name invested within them, indeed the integration of the individual self with its celestial counterpart. This is why Khidr symbolises the spiritual Guide, the Angel whom we shall see appear transformed in various forms, sometimes as the Archangel Gabriel, sometimes as the Beloved, sometimes as the Active Intellect.

‘The case of Ibn ‘Arabî, as a disciple of Khezr, falls within the category of Sufis who refer to themselves as *Owaysîs*[567]*. ”* For Ibn ’Arabî, the encounter with Khezr has three meanings: 1) he is, first and foremost, the Inner Guide; 2) he symbolises the conferral of the green cloak; 3) he is an initiation into the vertical order of ascension.

1) A memorable first encounter for Ibn ’Arabî took place during his adolescence whilst he was studying in Seville. The second encounter occurred in Tunis, on a warm night under a full moon. Ibn ’Arabî, resting in the cabin of a boat, saw someone walking towards him with dry feet upon the water; he spoke with him for a moment, then the man disappeared into a cave some miles away. The next day, a man met him and said: ‘Well then! How did it go last night with Khidr[568]?’

These encounters confirm that Ibn ’Arabî is on the path of the inner pilgrimage.

To meet Khidr is to prepare for the dialogue between the self and the Angel within the union of the Self, that is to say, within the very Totality of one’s individuality. In Sura XVIII (vv. 59–81), Khidr appears as Moses’s guide, that is to say, as his initiator ‘into the science of predestination’. He symbolises an innate knowledge superior to the law. Khidr is therefore superior to him, since he reveals to him the inner truth (*haqîqa*) of the Law[569] .

Thus, Khezr is both a person and an archetype. He is the master of all those without a master because he shows all those over whom he has authority how *to be* what he himself is[570]. His relationship with each and every one is that ‘of the exemplar or exemplarity with the exemplified t [571]’. It is in this way that he can be the individual archetypal master of each person. Moreover, the traits that characterise him lend themselves to this. He is described as the one who has reached the Source of Life, who has drunk from the Water of Immortality. He is, in other words, ‘the Eternal Adolescent’, the Verdant One (L. Massignon), the ever-Green t[572] . And green is “The spiritual liturgical colour of Isla m [573].”

2) Ibn ’Arabî is said to have received the investiture of the cloak in the year 601/1204. After a stop in Baghdad, he travelled to Mosul, drawn by the teachings of the Sufi master ’Alî ibn Jâmi’. This master, however, had received the investiture of the *khirqa*, the green cloak, directly from Khidr ‘in person’. Here is how Ibn

’Arabî describes the circumstances that led to this investiture:

‘This association with Khidr was experienced by one of our shaykhs, Shaykh ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Jami’ (…). He lived in a garden he owned on the outskirts of Mosul. There, Khidr himself had invested him with the cloak, in the presence of Qadîb Albân. And it was in that very spot in his garden where Khidr had clothed him that the shaykh in turn clothed me, observing the same ceremony that Khidr himself had observed when conferring the investitur e [574] .”

What the rite of investiture accomplishes is not merely an affiliation, but rather a identification with the spiritual state of Khezr. From now on, the mystic is Khezr; that is to say, he has attained the ‘Khezr of his being’.

3) To attain the state of Khezr is also to experience the dimension of transhistoricity, since, having crossed the boundary of the visible world, one reaches the Source of Life, and becomes capable of experiencing events that unfold in Heaven, in a realm other than physical reality. In a place where everything is transformed into a symbol, where everything is an event of the soul. Thus the investiture of the mantle is accomplished in two dimensions: that of the *latitudinal* order of successions, of generations that transmit the investiture without interruption, and that of the *longitudinal* order, which, by linking the visible to the invisible, grants us access to the hierohistory of the soul.

CHAPTER VI
The Theophany, the primordial cloud and the divine names

What, then, is the *leitmotif* of theophany in Sufism? The answer lies in the longing for the compassionate God hidden in the unfathomable depths of profound concealment. At the starting point, says Corbin,
"Let us recall the *hadith* that has been endlessly contemplated by all mystics in Islam, the one in which the Divine reveals the secret of its passion (its *pathos*): 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known. So I created creatures so that I might be known through them.' To remain more faithful to the thought of Ibn 'Arabî, let us translate it as: 'so that I might become, in them, the object of my knowledge'[575] ».

The entire theophanic cosmogony of creation can be deduced from the three moments contained within the structure of this *hadith*. God is a Hidden Treasure; this implies a profound concealment that can be identified with *the Theos agnostos*, the unknowable God. The Treasure loves to be known; within itself it feels a longing, a desire to reveal itself, then comes the second act which brings this very desire into play and names the *Divine Names*, emancipating them, so to speak, from this virtuality in which they were held.

It is through the Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rahmân*) that God brings the Names forth from their concealment. The divine Breath gives rise to the entire subtle mass of a primordial creation which Ibn 'Arabî refers to as the Cloud (*'amâ*). Hence the meaning of this hadith: 'The Prophet was asked: Where was your Lord before He created His (visible) creation? – He was in a Cloud; there was no space above or below[576].'

This Cloud exhaled from the Divine Being is that which both receives all forms and gives them forms to beings. It is active and passive, receptive and essentialising (*mohaqqiq*)[577]. This dual dimension is found at every level of being: the Divine Names are both *active*, in that they determine the attribute they endow, and *passive*, in that they are determined within and by the form that manifests them. Consequently, the Primordial Cloud, the Compassion of the Creative Breath, and the Absolute Imagination all denote the same original reality: the created God (*Haqq makhlûq*), from whom every creature is created. He is the Creator-Creature, the Hidden-Manifested, the First-Last. In this Cloud are manifested all forms of being, the Archangels, the genera, the species of individuals, down to the levels of inorganic nature. 'God,' says Ibn 'Arabî, 'unfolded in this Primordial Cloud the forms of all things that exist in this world, with the exception of Himself. This Cloud is an essentialising Imagination (*khayâl al-mohaqqiq*). Do you not see that it receives the forms of all created beings and *shapes* the forms (*mossawir*) from that which never existed… In this Cloud all created beings appeared, and it is called the manifest aspect of God, by virtue of what has been said (in the Qur'an): 'He is the First, the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden' é [578]."

Creation is neither an emanation in the Neoplatonic sense of the term nor a creation *ex nihilo*. 'It is rather a sequence of manifestations of being, through the intensification of a growing light, within the originally undifferentiated Divine; in essence, a succession of *tajallîyât*, of *theophanies*. Here we find one of the most characteristic themes of Ibn 'Arabî's thought, the doctrine of *the Divine Names* (which has sometimes been rather inaccurately referred to as his 'mythology' of the Divine Names)[579]."

There is therefore a double epiphany that relieves the Sorrow of the Hidden Treasure aspiring to emerge from the unfathomable abyss of Unknowing: the theophany or the most sacred effusion (*fayz aqdas*). This is the epiphany of the divine Being to itself and for itself. It consists of the theophany of God from pre-eternity and post-eternity to Himself in the form of the Fixed Essences (*'ayyân thâbita*) and their aptitudes and capacities[580] .

The second theophany is the Holy Effusion (*fayz moqaddas*), which is either 'hieratic or hierophanic'[581]or contemplative (*shohûdî*). This stage is the nuptial union of the realities of the Names and the Fixed Essences. Every Name aspires to manifest itself; this is what God's Nostalgia to make Himself known conveys. He therefore needs an epiphany, a mirror in which He can be reflected: the Knower (*'âlim*) aspires to be known (*ma'lûm*). That is to say, the Names require epiphanies to manifest themselves, just as the epiphanies aspire to the Names that will imbue them with their reality. This mutual yearning, this sympathy between the Fixed Essences that wish to be imbued with the divine presence (to the extent of their capacity) and the Names that seek a mirror in which to reflect themselves, constitutes in itself the second hierophanic theophany[582] .

1) The Divine Names

But what, then, are the Divine Names? When the Essence (*dhât*) takes on an attribute, it becomes the Name corresponding to that Attribute: endowed with knowledge (*ma'al 'ilm*), it becomes the All-Knowing; endowed with sight, it becomes the All-Seeing; endowed with power, it becomes the All-Powerful. But for these Names (the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing) to be *known*, they require a medium, an epiphanic form (*mazhar*). The Divine Names have no reason for being except in relation to the beings that manifest them. But just as the Divine Names have existed from all eternity, so too have the forms and supports capable of manifesting them always existed in eternity. The Divine Names have reality only for beings that are their epiphanic forms. These are referred to by Ibn 'Arabî and his school as the 'Fixed Essences' (*'ayyân thâbita*) or, according to certain commentators[583], as the 'Intelligible Forms of the Divine Names' (*sowar-e ma'kûla-ye asmâ'ye ilâhîya* in Persian). Each of these Fixed Essences, or 'eternal essences', is endowed with a certain ontological capacity and receives the effusion of Being or the Divine Name in proportion to that capacity—neither more nor less—and that which it is incapable of by its very nature will never be bestowed upon it. They are therefore likened to mirrors of Being. One of the characteristics of a mirror is that the image reflected in it takes on the condition of the mirror: it is not the mirror that is defined by the image reflected in it, but rather it is the mirror that causes the reflection of the image and imprints its properties upon it. The *Fixed Essences* are pure non-being (*'adam*) and it is God who endows them with their reality. They are, in other words, mirrors of divine Beauty, and the image reflected in them is the world. Furthermore, each Divine Name is the Lord (*rabb*) of the being that manifests it, the latter being the vassal (*marbûb*) of its Lord. Each being is the form of its own Lord (*al-rabb al-khâss*), that is to say, it manifests the Divine Essence only as particularised in that Name. No being can be the epiphanic form of the Divine in its entirety. 'Every being,' says Ibn 'Arabî, 'has as God only its Lord in particular; it is impossible for it to have the All-Encompassing One (t) ([584]).'

Finally, says Corbin, the divine Names are essentially relative to the beings who name them, as those beings experience them in their mode of being. This is why these Names are also referred to as *Presences* (*hadarât*), that is to say, as the states in which the divinity reveals itself to its faithful in the form of one or another of its infinite Names[585].

On the other hand, every being is the epiphany, or the vassal (*marbûb*), of a Name which is its Lord (*Rabb*), and this Name is identical to the One named, who is the Divine Essence; therefore, every Name must contain all the Names.

Dawûd Qaysarî, the famous commentator on Ibn ’Arabî’s *Fosûs*, says: ‘Each of the beings in the world is the sign (*’alâma*) of a divine Name, and since every divine Name encompasses the Essence, which itself encompasses all the Names, that Name must also contain all the Names; just as every being among beings is itself a world through which it knows the totality of the Names. Viewed in this light, the universes are infinite[586].”

CHAPTER VII
Creative imagination as theophany

The central idea of Ibn ’Arabî’s speculative mysticism is that creation is, above all, a theophany (*tajalli*). As such, it is the work of the Creative Imagination. In other words, the divinity possesses imagination and ‘it is by *imagining it* that God created the universe; that God drew this universe from his own bosom, from the eternal potentialities and powers of his own being; that there exists between the universe of pure spirit and the sensible world an intermediate world which is the world of Idea-Images, *mundus imaginal*[is587] ”. It is precisely upon this world, symbolised on the macrocosmic level as a primordial Cloud, that Imagination produces its effects. One might thus say that the elevation of the image to a degree of reality that is distinct and autonomous correlates with a concept of creation contrary to the idea of creation ex nihilo. The very fact that theophany has been reduced to creation ex nihilo presupposes a degradation of the imagination to the level of fantasy and the imaginary.

Yet in the gnosis of Ibn ’Arabî, the world of the Imagination—both at the macrocosmic level of the Primordial Cloud and at the microcosmic level of the human imagination contiguous to it—constitutes a real, objective, autonomous world, intermediate between the Spirit and the sensible. Its noetic organ is the Imagination, and it is through this organ that man gains access to the imaginal world where visionary events and symbolic stories take place and have their place.

Viewed in the context of Ibn ’Arabî’s theosophy, the imagination is a *theogony* in that it relates to the Primordial Cloud; it is also *a theogony* when it pertains to the ‘mythology’ of the Divine Names. Yet it is also *a cosmology*, for this creation is likewise the establishment of the universe as an act of theophany.

1) Conjunctive imagination and disjunctive imagination

Ibn ’Arabî distinguishes between a *connected imagination* (*khayâl mottasil*), which is inseparable from the imagining subject, and a *disconnected imagination* (*khayâl monfasil*), which is separate from the subject. As for the latter, it has an autonomous existence, subsisting in its own right, and corresponds to the plane of being symbolised by the Primordial Cloud or the Intermediate World of *the Imaginal*. ‘The fact that these separable Images subsist in a world of their own, and that consequently the Imagination in which they arise is a “Presence” possessing the status of an “essence” (*hadrat dhâtîya*), perpetually capable of receiving Ideas (*ma’ânî*) and Spirits (*arwâh*), of giving them the ‘body of appearance’ that allows their epiphany, all this clearly attests that we are as far removed as possible from any form of psychologism588 . “*Conjunctive* imagination is not doomed to arbitrariness since it is governed by disjunctive imagination. The vision of the Angel, for example, involves the transition from a spiritual reality on the plane of disjunctive imagination to that of conjunctive imagination, inseparable from the imagining subject. And this, whilst being linked to the imagining subject, leads to the *malakût* (the world of the soul). Moreover, Sohrawardî taught us that when the imagination was at the service of the Spirit, it became contemplative thought, whereas when subjugated by the estimative, it produced nothing but hazy fantasies and the phantasms of the imagination.

In fact, there is ultimately only one autonomous Imagination, because it is

Absolute Imagination (*khayâl motlaq*), 'that is to say,' says Corbin, '*absolved* of any condition subordinating its substance, and it is the primordial Cloud constituting the universe as a theophany[589]'. On the other hand, joint imagination, whilst being linked to the very subject that produces it, is itself one of the modes of absolute imagination, which is the absolutely all-encompassing Presence (*al-Hadrat al-jâmi'a, al-martabat al-shâmila*)[590] .

2) Imagination as an 'intermediate world'

The science of imagination is the *science of mirrors* (catoptrics), of mirrored surfaces, of suspended images. As the science of *the speculum*, it highlights the Docetist nature of the Image suspended between being and non-being. The forms perceived in the mirror have an apparitional existence, hence the need for a world of subtle forms, a visionary geography, which has its towers, its magical mountains, its rivers… For example, the form of a statue in its purest state, freed from wood, bronze or marble and which would itself be the substance of its subtle body, presupposes an *apparitional* mode that is that of the vision of images *suspended* in a mirror. Yet an image *suspended in mid-air* is neither material nor purely spiritual: it is in-between; it has an immaterial form, yet it also appears clothed in a form of its own. It is a world 'where spirits take on a corporeal form and bodies become spiritual'.

And it is because the world of the imagination is an intermediary realm, symbolising the worlds it mediates, that it is also the 'place of manifestation' for spiritual beings. Angels and spirits who appear there take on the form and shape of their 'body of manifestation'. Abstract concepts and sensory data meet there to blossom into concrete figures, so that this place becomes the setting for their drama. In other words, this place is the privileged space of the soul and its 'hierostory'.

Imagination, as an intermediary, also has a dual dimension:

a) (a) as creative imagination, envisioning the creation it envisages; and (b) as creaturely imagination, envisioning the Creator of whom it is the imagined form. *Whilst the former is an act of theophany, the latter, by contrast, is the Prayer of man envisioning his world, his God and his symbols.* (a) It is through active imagination that multiplicity exists, or, if you will, the transition from the One to the many. This is precisely what the initial Intention of the hidden Treasure, seeking to be known, has just brought about.

b) But since this Other-than-God is not absolutely separate from God, but is the very form of his creation, indeed the shadow of the divine Sun, and because the very form of this shadow is already imaginative 'matter', 'it is more than appearance,' says Corbin, 'it is apparition. And this is why a *ta'wîl* is possible, because there is symbol and transparency[591] ".

3) Imagination as spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wîl*)

Active imagination is the faculty that grants us access to the science of Images, mirrors and theophanies. It would be absurd to regard it as a futile or illusory science. For insofar as the divine Being wishes to know itself, it can do so only to the extent that it *employs* the faculty of its own imagination, just as we can penetrate the transparency of the veil only through our own imaginative power.

To say that the epiphanic form is other than God does not amount to degrading it, but to valuing it and 'establishing it as a symbol referring to the symbolised (*marmûz ilayhi*), which is the Divine Be n[592]'. And it is because the divine Being reveals itself through its Imagination that a science of the exegesis of forms is necessary, since it leads forms to their true nature, and reveals to us the *distant* realms that

are heralded beyond the symbol.

It is because there is Imagination that there is hermeneutics (*ta'wîl*), and it is because there is *ta'wîl* that there is symbolism[593],and indeed the dual dimension of things: the symboliser and the symbolised. This vision recurs in all the pairs of terms that characterise Ibn 'Arabî's gnosis: Creator and Creature (*Haqq* and *Khalq*), divinity and humanity (*Lâhût and Nasût*), Lord and servant (*Rabb and 'Abd*). The two terms in these pairs hardly contradict one another, but are, on the contrary, complementary, since they form a *coincidentia oppositorum*. And it is *the imagination* that brings about this conjunction, since it is the place where they meet. But what is important to note, says Corbin, 'is that the *mysterium conjonctionis* uniting the two terms is a theophanic union (viewed from the Creator's perspective) or a theopathic union (viewed from the creature's perspective); it is by no means a "hypostatic union"[594]'

4) God 'imagined' or 'God created in beliefs'

The act of divine imagination is described in various ways, such as the 'imagined God'—that is, the God projected by the Imagination (*al-Haqq al-motakhayyal*)—or the 'God created in beliefs' (*al-Haqq al-makhlûq fi'l i'tiqâdât*). The primordial act of the Divine imagining the world is answered, as a response to its own Love, by the creature imagining its own world. If the Divine created the world by imagining it, creation rediscovers its God by re-creating Him through its own imagination and according to its own belief. But it is not to the hidden Deity (*olûhîya*) that the creature addresses itself, but to the
the 'suzerainty' (*robûbîya*) of the Personal Lord. *Al-Lâh* is the Name that designates the Divine Essence, characterised by the universality of its Attributes, whereas the Lord, the *rabb*, is the Divine Being personified and individualised under one of its Names and Attributes. In other words, in this particularised Attribute, the Deity individualises Himself according to the capacity of the receptacle that receives Him, as its personal God (*rabb*).

Commenting on a verse by Ibn 'Arabî: 'By knowing Him, I give Him being', Corbin concludes that this does not mean that man brings into existence the Essence of God, which is beyond all determination; rather, it refers specifically to the 'God created in beliefs', that is to say, the God who presents Himself in every being in the form of what that being believes according to its capacity for knowledge. "The verse amounts to saying: I know God in proportion to the divine Names and attributes that are revealed to me and through me in the forms of beings, for God reveals Himself to each of us in the form of what we love; the form of your love is the very form of the faith you profess. From all this I 'create' the God in whom I believe and whom I worship[595] ." For the form that reveals itself is the very form of the one who receives it. God "is both that which reveals itself (*motajallî*) and that to which He reveals Himself (*motajallâ laho*)[596] ".

What we create through our imagination in response to the pre-existent imagination of the Divine is not a *fictitious* God, created from scratch, but that very thing which was destined for us from pre-eternity. This is why the Image of God created by the believer is also the Image of his own being revealed by the 'hidden treasure'. It is therefore *psychologically* true to say that 'the God created in "beliefs" is the symbol of the Self[597] ". In the very act of this dual creation, moving in opposite directions to meet one another, the totality of a self is reconstituted, uniting with its Angel or its personal Lord, and it is this integration that culminates in a *unio sympathetica*.

5) The imagination as a meeting place between human love and divine love

For human love to encounter divine love—in other words, for Love to enter into communion with the true Beloved, without straying into carnal desire or sinking into

the dizzying abstraction of an impossible love that Rûzbehân called the 'madness of the unattainable', there must be a proper meeting place. The imagination, by bringing the Spirit down to the level of the Image, and because it allows the emergence of a suitable space where the Image retains its own noetic value, and also because it makes possible, through its transfiguring power, the transmutation of sensory data into symbol, brings about a dual movement that converges at this point of junction which Ibn 'Arabî calls 'con-descent' (*monâzala*)[598] .

The Imagination is thus itself the meeting place where 'the supersensible Divine and the sensible descend together into a single [dwelling599]'. It is through the Imagination that the dialectic of love reaches its climax. Without it, the Beloved would have no concrete reality. The Beloved must be typified, symbolised in a concrete form by an active Imagination, and must attain a mode of existence in keeping with the transfigured eye that receives him. Imagination is what brings *about* the *harmony* between the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the physical. It is through love that it is possible, declares Ibn 'Arabî, 'to love a being of the sensible world in which one loves the manifestation of the divine Beloved; for then we spiritualise this being by raising it (from its sensible form) to its incorruptible image (that is to say, to the rank of a theophanic Image), by clothing it in a beauty superior to its own, and by endowing it with a presence such that it cannot lose it nor be absent from it, and thus the mystic never ceases to be united with the Belov é [600] ".

This *act of identification* creates the meeting place between the Lover and the Beloved, the invisible and the visible. But by virtue of the conjunction it brings about, it is also an 'imaginative union' (*ittisâl fi'l khayâl*), for without the transfiguration it reveals, any physical union would be but an illusion, a mental delusion. Pure 'imaginative contemplation' (*moshâhadat khayâlîya*) can attain such an intensity of presence that any physical contact would cause it to descend below its own level. And such is the phenomenon of Majnûn who, for Ibn 'Arabî as for Rûzbehân, symbolises the perfect Lover; Majnûn had identified so completely with Layla that he became the 'mirror of God' or the 'mirror of the eternal Bride'.

This excessive closeness between the Lover and the Beloved—a closeness that leads the mystic to say: 'The Beloved is closer to the Lover than his jugular vein e [601]'—also raises the question of the reversibility of their relationship. Just as with Rûzbehân, the transfiguration of the gaze meant that the Lover contemplated the Beloved with the eye through which the latter saw himself; likewise, in Ibn 'Arabî, it is simultaneously true to say that the Beloved is within us and is not within us, that his heart is in the beloved, or that the beloved is in his heart; for once the level of conjunction is reached, the relationships are reversed, and it is the imagination that brings about this transfiguration, so that Ibn 'Arabî adds: *'The divine Lover is Spirit without a body; the purely physical lover is a body without a spirit; the spiritual lover (that is to say, the mystical lover) possesses both Spirit and [body602]*.' Spiritual love, in other words, is that which possesses the secret of amphiboly (Rûzbehân). It is sheltered from both pure abstraction and anthropomorphic idolatry. And this interdependence, this 'unity of their duality', where each derives its role from the other, Corbin calls a *unio sympathetica*[603] .

However, Love also brings another factor into play: the Image of woman. God loved
Eve, for by loving Eve as he does, Adam is merely imitating God's very model; according to our *shaykh*, Adam becomes a divine embodiment (*takhalloq ilâhî*). And this means that in his spiritual love for woman, man loves none other than his Lord[604]. Thus, Woman is ultimately the mirror in which man contemplates his own Image, the one that represents his own Self.

CHAPTER VIII
The Religion of Love

Regarding Divine Love, Ibn 'Arabî states: 'whichever way one chooses to look at it, the movement from the unchanging concealment (of God) towards His manifestation is a movement of Love on the part of both God and the manifested world[605] '.

But Love has two dimensions: on the one hand, it is the desire for the hidden Treasure that seeks to to be realised in beings so as to be revealed through them and for them; on the other hand, it is the love or desire of beings for God, or God's love for Himself, since He is both Creator and creature, the Lover and the Beloved. This dual movement—God's Love manifesting itself in beings and the Love of those beings aspiring to unite with the Names of which they are the epiphanies—corresponds to the two arcs of the Descent and the Ascent, one of which typifies the ceaseless influx of being and the other the movement of return towards divinity; the former, creation in a recurring and unfailing outpouring; the latter, the resurrections of beings and their return to their initial and final cause.

"In reality, the being who yearns with nostalgia (*al-moshtâq*) is at the same time the being towards whom that nostalgia yearns (*al-moshtâq ilayhî*)[606] . " These are not two different and heterogeneous beings but a being encountering itself (both *one* and *two*, a bi-unity) [607] .

Thus Ibn 'Arabî distinguishes three modes of Love: 1) *divine Love* (*hibb ilâhî*), which is nothing but the desire for God manifested in the creature, aspiring to return to itself. It is this dialectic of Love that constitutes the eternal divine-human dialogue; 2) *spiritual Love* (*hibb rûhânî*), whose seat is the creature and whose sole concern is to be reunited with the Beloved; 3) *natural love* (*hibb tabî'î*), or the love of one who wishes to possess, who seeks to satisfy his desires without taking into account the desire of the Beloved. 'And such, alas!' says Ibn 'Arabî, 'is the way in which most people today understand love[608] .'

"Once again, the spiritual and the physical must be brought into *harmony*, so that love may blossom as the *theopathy* within the creature that responds to the divine longing to be known; that is to say, so that the bi-unity, *the unio sympathetica*, of the Lord of Love (*rabb*) and his servant of love (*marbûb*) may come to pass[(609)] ." This brings us once again to the mediating function of the imagination, which is the meeting place between human love and divine love. This establishment of sympathy neglects neither the spiritual aspect of divine Love nor its physical aspect, but ensures that the latter appears transfigured at the level of the Spirit, that is to say, typified in a concrete form. Thus, on the one hand, love 'physical' in that the soul contemplates a concrete image, yet at the same time a spiritual love, for it is not so much a matter of possessing the image as of being entirely imbued with it. This combination perfectly describes the mystical love of the Fidèles d'Amour[610] . It is this same doctrine of *transfigured Eros* that Corbin finds in Sohrawardî and in Rûzbehân. 'And the entire dialectic of love found in an Ibn 'Arabî, of a Rûzbehân, or of a Jalâloddîn Rûmî, by investing the Beloved with this *aura*, this dimension beyond, will be preserved from an idolatry which the asceticism of his critics is, on the contrary, so quick to detect therein, precisely because it is blind to this dimension beyond. And this is indeed the most fruitful paradox of the religion of the Faithful of Love, which recognises in every Beloved the one and only Beloved, and in every divine Name the totality of Names, because between the divine Names there is a *unio sympathetic a*[611] ."

It is at the heart of Ibn ’Arabî’s *Diwân* that this declaration of love by the Believer bursts forth, when, whilst performing ritual circumambulations around the *Ka’ba*, he encountered the Most Pure Virgin in the concrete form of the young Persian girl.

‘O wonder! A garden amidst the flames… My heart
has become capable of all forms.
It is a meadow for gazelles and a monastery for [Christian
monks,
A temple for idols and the Ka’ba of the pilgrim, The
Tablets of the Torah and the Book of the Qur’an.
I profess the religion of Love, and whatever direction His
steed may take, Love is my religion
and my faith ,[1612].”

Conclusion

The relevance of Henry Corbin's thought[613]

What makes Henry Corbin's thought relevant today? What makes this thought relevant is the unthought or the unexplained that he uncovers. Heidegger says on this subject: "The greater the work of a thinker – which is in no way measured by the extent and number of his writings – the richer is the unthought it contains, that is to say, that which, for the first time, thanks to it, rises to the surface as having not yet been thought614."

What, then, is the unthought contained within Henry Corbin's thought? When we peruse the
Tracing the stages of Corbin's spiritual journey, from the early insights of his youth to his full maturity, we see that his entire endeavour is directed towards embracing a form of *knowledge* that is not outdated because it belongs to the past, but is relevant in the present because it opens up to the future. By taking up the legacy of this thought, Corbin becomes its heir, so that he himself becomes 'in the present' this tradition. Referring to the relevance of the Iranian-Islamic tradition, he concludes: 'The past is merely something that one "overcomes". It is a matter of understanding what once made that past possible, brought it about, and was its future. To the extent that a soul recaptures this possibility, because it is mysteriously innate to it, it in turn *becomes* the future itself. It liberates what we call the past from the weight that made it the past é[615] ."

It is because the soul has a *history* that is always 'in the present', because this history contains within itself the major stages of its fall and its ascent, because its past is its origin and its ascent its future; and because, between this *prehistory* and this *posthistory*, its *hierohistory* blossoms, always ready to be brought into the present by the one who takes on that responsibility. All four of Corbin's paths—prophetic, ontological, narrative and erotic-mystical—whose main threads we have traced in this book, recount, in a sense, a 'narrative of initiation ' (*hikâyat*), the history of the soul and the way in which it links its past to its future in the very act of individuation that Corbin describes as the 'encounter with the Angel'. In this encounter, the soul brings its history full circle, so that the starting point of its past (Origin) meets the end point of its future (Return).

But such an endeavour can only be realised if, on the one hand, it breaks away from a rigid conception of tradition reduced to a 'funeral procession' and, on the other, distinguishes itself from the imperatives of historicism pure and simple. Hence Corbin's struggle on two fronts: to show that tradition is dead only for those very people who interpret its message as a dead letter, and at the same time to reveal that this tradition (which is a constant rebirth for anyone who takes it upon themselves to uphold it) cannot be reduced to the negating movement of nihilism, for which the great structures of the mind are merely epiphenomena of nature and history. These two struggles are complementary in Corbin's work: the revaluation of the spirit goes hand in hand with a critique of the reductive values of our time. Seen in this context, Corbin joins the ranks of the destroyers of our age: the repression of the *Lebenswelt* highlighted by the crisis of European consciousness (Husserl), Heidegger's ontological destruction, the eclipse of reason demonstrated by the Frankfurt School, and the withdrawal of the mind's projections revealed by depth psychology (Jung). All these thinkers denounce

In their own way, they are exposing the impoverishment of the spirit and rediscovering a facet of the truth. It is no less significant that the most daring thinkers, coming from camps as opposed as those of Horkheimer and Heidegger, pass such a harsh judgement on the spiritual fate of humanity. We speak of secularisation, demythologisation, desacralisation, the levelling of man reduced to the one-dimensionality of instrumentalised thought, and so on: negative terms which, all things considered, reveal the diminishment of the mind's otherwise significant faculties. But whilst most of these thinkers denouncing the symptoms of this evil take pleasure in the critical task without making any choice whatsoever, Corbin, whilst denouncing them, nonetheless reveals the outcome that will put an end to this 'Western exile'. Whether the path he shows us is sufficient consolation for some or an illusory hope for others is not our concern here; what matters, however, is that he had the courage to choose and to reorient a mode of thought that is out of balance precisely because it lacks its polar dimension. The catastrophism that characterises most of our thinkers reveals an anomaly in relation to a previous state of affairs: reason becomes instrumentalised because it loses all ontological contact with its original seat: the *logos;* symbols atrophy because the values that once crystallised them within *cultural canons* are collapsing one after the other; the domination of technology becomes a challenge and 'seizure', for Being conceals itself behind its successive withdrawals, and so on. In short, the catastrophe is upon us, yet no one knows how to escape it. Whilst the present loses its value in comparison with a past that is revealed to be ever richer and even nostalgic, the present itself is now reduced to absence, and the future is excluded from the horizon of expectation. The entire history of thought is, in the end, nothing but the history of nihilism: 'Higher values are losing their worth,' says Nietzsche, 'because ends are lacking.' Between a beginning that merges with the materiality of empirical facts and a future reduced to a regression, history no longer makes sense; it is *disoriented*. All the values upon which the sacred history of humanity rested have lost their credibility, and we are entering a period of limbo that is the result of a double negation: 'neither the God of Christ… nor the God of the philosophers… neither good nor evil, neither responsibility nor guilt, neither connection to an order nor duty' (H. Rauschning). Man thus lives without 'internal unity, at the mercy of impulses, moments, *flashes* of will and sensations, without sequence, without connection, without duration'.

What sets Corbin's critique apart from that of other great critics of our time, however, is that his perspective is not merely that of an indifferent observer, but that of a visionary who views the world through the lens of the mind itself: his presence in the world is an 'engaged' one, yet engaged here and now, beyond and above death. It is from within this very vision that he revalues or devalues, as the case may be, the symptoms of our civilisation. When he speaks of *incarnation* (understood in the historicist sense of the term), in his mind this is counterbalanced by the Docetist vision of the 'mirror phenomenon'; when he refers to allegory, he disparages it in comparison to the multifaceted dynamism of the symbol; when he denounces the metaphysical idolatry to which a monotheism oblivious to its true paradox leads, he sets against it the amphiboly (*iltibâs*) of the Image which is and is not at the same time; or even the theophanic vision of the world, without which there would be neither Angel, nor symbol, nor apophatic theology. Its past is never behind it as a criterion for comparison with the present state, but a past which, at every moment, may arise in consciousness as its future. The allegory has an autonomous reality only if the space where the transmutation of the symbol unfolds remains veiled from the inner gaze; incarnation is a hindrance only insofar as the gaze, falling back upon itself, fails to blossom in the transfiguration of the intellectual Image. And if 'the socio-political ideologies of the West are the secularisations and de-religionisations of the previous systems s[616] ', the reason is that we are unable to cross the threshold of meta-history where relationships are reversed, for at that level history is transfigured under the projection of another gaze.

The pairs of terms that emerge from his dual attitude—which is both devaluing and revaluing—such as allegory and symbol, historicism and theophany, demythologisation and visionary narratives, nihilism and apophatic theology, point to other *modes of perception*. There are other ways of seeing, just as there are different ways of being; one cannot exist without the other. And if we remain at one level—in other words, if we tip the scales too far to one side without regard for balance—it is because we have forgotten the 'the science of the Balance' (*'ilm al-Mîzân*). For the 'visible aspect of a being presupposes that it is balanced by its invisible, celestial counterpart. The apparent, the exoteric (*zâhir*), is balanced by the hidden, the esoteric (*bâtin*). Modern agnostic rejection ignores this law of integral being and thus merely mutilates the wholeness of every be e[617] ." And amongst these various modes of perception, there is a point of equilibrium that remains equidistant from a double peril which has always tempted thinkers and theologians. Between the theological rigour of the doctors of the Law, who take such good care of God that they end up locking Him away in a forgotten drawer, and reductionists of every stripe who, wielding values, create systems of the world from scratch, turning every fragment of Being into a new divinity, there is the gaze of the wise man who remains between the two – not between two negations in the nihilistic sense of the term – but between two reductions in order to save the 'phenomenon' of the world. But a world in its own right, seen as an image in a mirror and not as distorted images through broken mirrors. For all the fragments of Being are elevated to 'things in themselves', be it the will to power, or the 'sanctification of the ego', or as Corbin puts it, 'the hypertrophy of the self degenerating into spiritual imperialism l[618] '. In short, everything that falls under the 'agnostic reflex' which has nowadays become the natural behaviour of man having lost his soul. In this sense, Corbin revalues and rehabilitates the amphiboly, the paradox, the double meaning inherent in the unusual nature of things. The world is an 'Image in Suspension' upon a mirror. And only he whose eye has become a mirror sees it as an Image in Suspension, and the eye becomes a mirror only when the veil covering the world, as well as the soul contemplating it, become mirrors themselves, reflecting the same Image. It is this phenomenon that Corbin designates as the theophanic vision, contrasting it at times with 'metaphysical idolatry', at times with historicising incarnation, and at times with the abstract monotheism of the religious themselves; in short, with all the *'isms'* which, in one form or another, prevent its blossoming and perception. For the loss of the soul resulting from this double reduction (consisting in tipping the balance one way or the other) is also the loss of the subject's own singularity. We do not mean the subject who, as *a* suspended *ego*, would face other *egos* so that, reflecting one another, they create the narcissistic interplay of crossed fire, but the spiritual individuality whose dimension transcends *the ego* as such and which implies a vertical extension of being in the sense of height and the integration of the polar dimension. If the loss of the individual leads to the 'collectivisation of the psyche ' [619], this results in the disorientation of symbols, or even the loss of the imaginal dimension. For, as Corbin says: 'The vertical dimension is individuation and sacralisation; the other is collectivisation and secularisation. The former liberates both the individual shadow and the collectiv e shadow [620].'

The tragedy of a culture can also arise when every essence within it is perceived in the form of the logical universal of the concept: with this, one writes only a treatise on theoretical philosophy. With the concrete singular, one writes history or a novel. With the metaphysical universal, manifesting itself at the level of the concrete, that of *the mundus imaginalis*, one writes a visionary narrative, or a narrative of initiation n[621] . In other words, spiritual individuality cannot be contained within the framework of a novel where characters in limbo, like Cartesian egos, must confront, instead of an absolute truth, a network of truths that contradict one another, and where the only certainty is 'the wisdom of uncertainty', as Milan Kundera puts it[622] . It is therefore not surprising that the novel has never been produced in

classical Persian literature.

But why this loss? It is undoubtedly the story of a separation, a divorce between faith and knowledge, intellect and psyche. They also symbolise two destinies: the destiny of Averroism and that of Avicennism.

"The names of Avicenna and Averroes," says Corbin, "could be taken as symbols of the respective spiritual destinies that awaited the East and the West, without the divergence between them being attributable solely to Averroism[623]. ' Indeed, Averroes' cosmology – strictly adhering to Peripatetic principles – succeeded in dismantling the second hierarchy of Avicenna's angelology, notably that of the Celestial Souls. And with this elimination, the world of the soul, its symbols, visionary geography, that 'transmission belt' which ensured the upward continuity of the universes – so that the science of hermeneutics, whose purpose was to unveil the space of the soul, was reduced to a mere technique of interpreting the literal sense in the figurative sense and was no longer the contemplative act of negative theology. Consequently, Averroes rejected Avicenna's idea of the Active Intellect as *Dator formarum*, that is to say, this Intellect which precisely allowed for the homology between the intellect of the philosophers and the angel of revelation of the prophets. 'Now,' concludes Corbin, 'once the notion *of the Anima caelestis* has been abolished, what will become of the principle that lay at the foundation of Avicennian anthropology: the homology between *the Anima caelestis* and *the Anima humana*? The homology between the relationship of the human soul with the active angelic Intelligence and the relationship of each *Anima caelestis* with the Intelligence by which its desire moves it? How would the mystical journey to the East in the company of Hayy ibn Yaqzâ n[624] still be possible?"

And, whilst Averroism culminated in politics to take shape in naturalistic anthropology
Following in the footsteps of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Avicennism marked the beginning of a series of visionary narratives which, from Avicenna to Sohrawardi, would culminate in the theosophy of the Isfahan School in the 17th century and then in the gnosis of the Shaykhie School in the 19th century in Iran.

Yet the development of the entire history of Western thought has taken place at the expense of the major structures of the traditional worldview and, according to Corbin, first and foremost at the expense of the world of the in-between, or indeed the *imaginal* world. Its loss, as has often been said, caused an irreparable rift within the mind, a dangerous split between the Intellect and the Psyche[625] . Yet not only did this split materialise in the West through the triumph of Averroism, but it was also the starting point of a process that we have elsewhere termed the *ontological stripping down* of the world and of hum e[626] , that is to say, the demythologisation of time, the disenchantment of nature, the naturalisation of man and the instrumentalisation of reason. Four reductive movements ranging 1) from the contemplative vision to technical thought; 2) from substantial forms to mechanico-mathematical concepts; 3) from spiritual substances to primitive drives; 4) from eschatology to the idolatry of history (Gilbert Durand). The point of convergence of these four movements constitutes, if you will, the *Gestalt* of the West's global impact, which, by virtue of its universal domination, has severed all genuine dialogue between civilisations. In contrast to these four downward movements relative to the polar dimension of the Spirit, Corbin's four paths aim precisely to retrace the reverse course of these descents and to re-evaluate, in turn, the meditative function of thought, the theophanic vision of nature, the spiritual individuation of man, and the hierohistory of the soul. To these four reductive movements, Corbin opposes four ascents through revelation, thought, imagination and affectivity, which constitute as many breaks in level and *ta'wîl* (hermeneutics). Thus, beyond scientific and technical thought, Corbin proposes a presential knowledge (*'ilm hozûrî*) that culminates in a metaphysics of presence; in the face of the mathematisation of the world, he highlights the function

mediator and theophanic manifestation of the Angel; in the face of the primal impulses that underpin modern ideologies as underlying structures, it reveals the mystical experience of individuation; and, finally, in the face of historicism, it unveils the events in Heaven that take place within the visionary realm of symbols.

This endeavour is all the more commendable given that the divisions in question remain, so to speak, open wounds in the modern worldview. To our knowledge, no one has highlighted their opposition more effectively than T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer in their book **The Dialectic of Reason* n*[627] . This book posits two complementary theses: myth is already reason, and reason turns into mythology. By instrumentalising itself, reason becomes subjectivised (separating from the *Logos*) and regresses to the state of nature; in doing so, it turns against itself, that is to say, it becomes an instrument of self-destruction in totalitarian systems. These two thinkers oppose the identity of the universal concept with 'the dialectic of non-identity', the rejection of any levelling of the Individual within any collective order: Hegelian totality or classless society, in order to save man's threatened individuality. But while non-identity saves the individual, it does not thereby integrate them into a spiritual whole; far from it, the individual remains doubly torn between a totality they reject and the
"nostalgia for a radically other"[628] which remains, in a sense, inaccessible. Faced with these two possibilities—identity and non-identity—Corbin advocates spiritual individuation, which cannot be reduced either to any collective identity or to any mutilation of *the ego o*[629] .

What the Frankfurt School calls the instrumentalisation of reason, others describe
. There is a whole negative assessment of the history of thought, the connotations of which are found at times as passive and active nihilism (Nietzsche), at times in the form of the Discourse of Being withdrawing into History (Heidegger), sometimes as a withdrawal of projection, provoking compensations capable of revaluing the void left by the flight of the Gods (Jung), sometimes as the loss of *the aura* that once characterised the cultic value of things (W. Benjamin). The common denominator of all these disparaging views converges on a single point: the withdrawal of something that was there and is no longer. Yet these subtractions made from the spiritual faculties of the integral human being had realities that could not be more concrete. Whether it be the eschatological content of time, the theophanic forms of Nature envisaged as *Liber revelatus*, the act of human presence beyond death, or the experience of spiritual individuation (the encounter with the Angel). Their gradual decline meant that the *de-symbolised* mind placed itself at the service of man's interests and instincts; and in seeking to repress nature, man regressed towards that very nature he believed he had definitively subdued; nature took its revenge by ideologising, precisely, man's magical universe.

It is precisely because of this split between myth and reason, between the Soul and the Intellect, that these two aspects of being—whose essential *unity* within Being once safeguarded humanity's presence in the world—were separated, and a rift arose between myth and reason: so that the latter developed to the detriment of the former, and their co-presence was replaced by the dialectic of their opposition, that is to say, that of *the Aufklärung*. For to the visionary, myth is just as 'reasonable' as reason is mythical: it is this very identification that Islamic philosophy sought to achieve when it equated the active Intellect of the philosophers with the Angel of Revelation of the prophets; and the entire endeavour of gnosis consisted precisely in safeguarding the imaginal space of their transmutation, where reason took the form of Active Imagination just as Nature there transmuted sensory data into symbols. Imagination was the 'medium', the 'place' where the opposition of the two was reconciled in the epiphanic forms of symbols; where, thanks to the transmuting faculty of gnosis, the dualism of the ego and the unconscious was integrated into the totality of the Self, and where, finally, this opposition was not transformed into a synthesis capable of identifying subject and object within

some ideological totality, but into a *reversal*, a conversion, a break in level that was unveiling.

It is in this sense that one must interpret all parapsychological experiences, which constitute the theory and practice of *mandalas* as well as the physiological basis of the 'Man of Light' e [630]. Thus this experience of the Self, which safeguarded the wholeness of the Individual, stood in opposition to both totalising identity and alienating non-identity.

Corbin, by highlighting the spiritual crisis of humankind and offering a remedy for it, thereby provides an answer to this dilemma. He shows what, within the context of this essential dichotomy of humankind, remains unthought and can only be brought to consciousness through a sustained reciprocal effort on both sides, involving a respective awakening of consciousness in both the West and the East.

But then how is this to be achieved? Since Corbin's example remains a one-way pilgrimage. If Corbin's entire endeavour is an 'amplifying hermeneutics' (Paul Ricœur) aimed at bringing humanity out of its 'fall into captivity', so that he might rediscover, from the 'time of the fall', the Angel of the Land of Visions: is the reverse of this pilgrimage equally true? In other words, if Corbin makes the transition from Heidegger to Sohrawardî, are the latter's heirs capable of doing the reverse, that is, of retracing the path from Sohrawardî back to the time of distress foretold by Heidegger? But retracing this path would mean that we are capable of recognising the extraordinary adventure that was the history of Being in the West; that we are able to demonstrate, piece by piece, what captivates us and whose origins remain so obscure to us. It would also mean that we have already mastered the critical method of 'reductive hermeneutics' (Ricœur). But unfortunately, this is not the case. Heidegger adds: 'Throughout our history, "thinking" has meant conforming to the injunction of Being and, starting from this conformity, surveying, discussing and describing the being-there in its being, discoursing upon it. This discourse (*dialegesthai*) develops in the history of Western thought and becomes dialectic[631]. "Whether this discourse is the progressive development of the Spirit in history (Hegel) or the history of its withdrawals – appearing as *idea* with Plato, *energeia* with Aristotle, substantiality in the Middle Ages or as the subjectivity of the Cartesian ego in modern times, to ultimately culminate in the 'will of the will' of the era of global dominati e[632] – remains, all things considered, inaccessible to us.

It is this discourse on being that eludes non-Westerners, so that the West which they recognise that it already appears to them in its most fossilised forms, that is to say, in the ideological form in which being is reduced to an infrastructure. 'The unbroken chain of evolution, which from Marx goes back to the dawn of thought where the co-belonging of *mythos* and *logos* was still perceptible to the earliest thinkers, eludes them, as does the whole problem of Western tradition' [633].

Henceforth, the point of contact between the two worlds can no longer be interpreted in terms of the injunctions contained neither in the discourse of being (i.e. *dialegesthai*), nor through the expansive hermeneutics of the kind employed by Corbin, but presents itself as a barren terrain that encompasses the shortcomings of both, a terrain where the West is reduced to a socio-economic infrastructure capable of accommodating any idea, and where the 'Eastern' content of tradition is also unconsciously Westernised. It is, therefore, ideology in all its irrationality, false consciousness and rigidity that becomes the mutilated language of this new dialogue of the deaf.

On the one hand, an ethnocentric, Hellenocentric West, which remains trapped within the categories of history; on the other, an East disoriented in relation to its own tradition and incapable of internally assimilating the dialectical progression of that history. This is why it seems to us that the way out of this dilemma would require a dual journey on both sides, aimed at reintegrating these two worlds which remain

whether we like it or not, the two complementary dimensions of being. Let us refer back to what we said elsewhere: 'If Western man today feels the need to resort to an "amplifying hermeneutics" aimed at rediscovering the neglected language of mythopoetic thought; if this endeavour not only reveals to him what he is in the forgotten recesses of his memory, but at the same time predisposes him to the integration of other levels of culture, his Eastern counterpart, for his part, should direct his efforts towards a 'reductive hermeneutics' (demystification) designed to destroy (I would almost say *dismantle*), within their proper context and free from false identifications, those hybrid concepts he has forged under the influence of his unconscious Westernisation. Knowing how to follow both paths at once: this is the condition for a genuine dialogue between man and himself. But such a movement would require, on both sides, a genuine need for mutual de-ideologisation, a liberation from the closed circles in which the Manichean attitudes of the espri t[634]find their comfort."

Thus, one cannot succeed without the other. Whilst Corbin, the Western pilgrim, begins his mystical journey from his Western exile in order to re-evaluate man's spiritual individuality and reintegrate it into the experience of encountering the Angel, his Eastern counterpart, apart from being expected to have re-evaluated this same experience in the context of modern man, must have experienced the vertigo of history's fall and felt the impact of the time of distress, which is the sine qua non of all awakening. Whilst the East may revitalise its tradition and be reborn in its own time, the fact remains that it too is subject to the impersonal flow of history; that it may live according to its own time whilst remaining captive within history. But the impact of this historical time is such that, *collectively*, it cannot circumvent it; it cannot escape its grip, bypass it and arrive at some sort of utopian transcendence. It can only face it: face it in order to free itself from it and understand its workings. Otherwise, it would be its unwitting victim. Whilst individually – and even then – anything is possible, and whilst man may make the leap beyond death, socially such transcendence is impossible. For the social must be thought through. Yet all non-Western cultures lag behind Western ideologies. They are all contaminated by the imperatives of history and all submit without a fight to the power of nihilism and the ongoing process of ideologisation. This is why any revaluation of a tradition that is not accompanied by a consciousness in keeping with the spirit of the age, by a putting into perspective of historical destiny, far from leading to a shortcut out of history, would only further hasten the process of ideologisation, inevitably provoking that insidious phenomenon we have elsewhere termed: unconscious Westernisation[(635)] .

In the face of this double impasse, two recently published books, both drawing on Corbinian hermeneutics, attempt to initiate the beginnings of a tentative dialogue: we refer to Christian Jambet's book, **La logique des Orientaux**,and our own, **Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?**. Two very different books, yet both consider the same situation from the perspectives of the West and the East. Jambet is a philosopher; he wants Western philosophy to emerge from its narrow shell, to extend the task of the phenomenology of the Spirit to other continents of reason, notably those revealed to us by the 'Logic of the Orientals', the relevance of which is attested to by Corbin's work.

"Henry Corbin," says Christian Jambet, "saw his task expand to the scale of a general phenomenology. The aim would then be to bring to light the noemae of *the East*, in order to generalise reason, the *western* continent of which Husserl had begun to explore following Kant and Nietzsche. Here again, the ambition was to bypass Hegel, not at the insurmountable level of his philosophy of law, but at that of the philosophy of the Spirit t [637]. ' Thus, the true task of philosophy would be, first and foremost, to rediscover this *Eastern* continent where, so to speak, the 'autobiography of the Angel of Humanity' is played out, and to reinsert it into the horizon of our philosophical knowledge. To found, as it were, a non-Hegelian phenomenology, that is to say, a phenomenology which, by virtue of being situated 'outside

Hegel's 'space' would break away from history and, in so doing, revert to the level of the *mundus imaginalis* of Eastern logic. Yet the great problem is that Western thought lacks precisely a 'metaphysical framework' capable of ensuring the ontological existence of this intermediate world where spirits become corporeal and bodies become spiritual, and which could thereby preserve it from the deranged excesses of the imagination. Everything suggests that the prodigious development of Western thought could only have come about at the expense of that world; otherwise, the epistemological divide we witness today between *cultures*—a divide due in part to the incompatibility of the worlds at stake—could never have arisen. Jambet knows this, for whilst defining the *'mundus imaginalis'* as the substance of meta-history[(638)] '—whose intelligible forms are the *Names* (the archetypal Forms) that manifest only in *the singular* (as opposed to the abstract universal)—he sets it in direct opposition to historical time and speaks of the 'gap between the two times'. "Now we must note," he says, "that between these two realities, history and metahistory, no pre-established harmony is admissible. Quite the contrary, what appears to us is a gaping chasm, such that the *points of contact* remain enigmatic[639] ."

It is this gap that gives rise to an irreducible opposition between cultures and ensures that we have, on the one hand, a being-towards-death and, on the other, a being-towards-beyond-death. For there to be metahistory, there must be *hierohistory*; and for there to be hierohistory, there must be a subtle matter capable of projecting it; and for there to be the imaginal, there must be the Angel. But dialectical reason cannot open itself to the Angel, just as Cartesian extension cannot discover the theophanic forms of nature, just as the repressed myth cannot be reconciled with a fetishised reason. The logic of the Orientals, without the critical apparatus of reason, would degenerate into totalitarian ideology, just as an instrumentalised reason devoid of spiritual purpose sadly leads to the existential misery of the one-dimensional man. Thus Jambet is right to evoke the wonders of the logic of the Orientals. But then what must be done to remain on the fine line between the two worlds? To be present on both levels of being without confusing them, nor reducing one to the other. Not to sink either into the excess of delusional fanaticism nor into the atrophied forms of a *disoriented* history.

What is a religious revolution? seeks, for its part, to show that the dominance of reason in history hastens the collapse of that *metaphysical ecology* which made the existence of this lost continent possible (Logic of the Orientals). The destruction of the great structures of the mind has not only diminished the verticality of return—that is, the polar dimension of being and the apophatic and affirmative theologies that accompany them—but also the imaginal space of transmutations through which the visionary narrative had a *situs*, a place enabling it to take place. The fundamental breach that was to lead to Cartesian duality was never bridged. Henceforth, this schism found a solution not through a theophany which, at a pinch, might have saved the 'phenomenon of the world ' but through the artifice of dialectical thought which, with Hegel, became the *process* of being itself, thereby shifting the ontological problem from the horizon of being to that of history, itself hypostatised to the rank of an insurmountable *Fatum*. Due to the relentless hegemony of this Reason, all other civilisations entered, without having chosen to do so themselves, into the magnetic field of history, subjected here to the most distorted forms, there to the most reductionist discourses, churning everything into incongruous amalgams, and hoping that, by counter-attacking the aggressive forms of the West in the name of a traditional identity that was, all things considered, illusory, one might free oneself from them or, at best, subdue them and render them obsolete. Alas! This was to underestimate the impact of modernity, which not only completely transformed the 'cultural climate' and the sociological structure of the societies in question, but also radically altered the foundations of belief, so that an entire *infrastructural* current surreptitiously replaced the old cultural constellation. The *Da* of *Dasein* was now shrinking to the flat level of an infrastructure, and it is within this

a narrow framework into which the eschatological content of the Qur'anic verses was poured.

Thus, **What is a Religious Revolution?**, starting from the same premises that inspired Jambet's **The Logic of the Orientals**, took the opposite path yet arrived at the same conclusion. It is true that the task of phenomenology must extend to a generalised phenomenology; it is also desirable that the West should emerge from its ethnocentric shell; but it is equally true that the East must gain a thorough understanding of that very reason which, over the past four centuries, had transformed the world and created modern civilisation. The heirs of Sohrawardî could no longer venture into the lost continent of the soul (at least culturally at the collective level) until they had assimilated dialectical reason itself. This led to a strange paradox: to save the soul and the individual, society had to *be secularised*. For without the separation of faith and knowledge, there can be no subject of law, and therefore no democracy. Without the disenchantment of the world, there can be no objectivity, and without the Galilean mathematisation of the world, there can be no natural sciences and no new cosmology. Without the biological shock of phylogeny, there would be no natural history of humankind, and without the destruction of the great cultural taboos, there would be no understanding of the obscure mechanisms of the unconscious. What was being revalued on the one hand became, on the other—that is, in a world deprived of the solid premises of dialectical reason—a delirious, not to say insane, process of ideologisation. For modernity had not only shattered the closed world of traditional civilisations, but had also mutilated its metaphysical topography and destroyed the sociological framework of human relations, right down to the level of inner space, which now found no shelter from the changes underway. From then on, the world of Images had withdrawn from the world to take refuge in the background of repression. We were, in a sense, witnessing a withdrawal of projections in which the phenomenon of compensation, acting as a counterweight to the devalued value, no longer valued a particular region of being—as in the example of substitutions within the Western psyche, where, for instance, Reason replaced revelation only to be supplanted in turn by the drives—but rather the distorted Images of tradition itself. It was therefore no longer Reason as *lumen naturale* that came to replace our modernity, but an ideologised religion in which revelation flowed directly into the infrastructural world of new ideologies without having undergone the gradual training of dialectical reason. To give an even more concrete example, the Angel Gabriel descended into history to become the Guide of a spiritual order, but a Guide who remained, unwittingly, captive to the ruse of history.

For spiritual individuality to flourish, it was necessary—by one of the inexplicable paradoxes of our times—for man to be able to live in a secularised environment. Hence the need for a dual truth which, at this point, took on the significance of salvation. Between the individual and his metaphysical ecology there was a dichotomy, such that man now had to remain, individually, at all hermeneutic levels, whilst collectively living, in full consciousness, the dimension of historicity. The gap of which Jambet speaks was a gap between the spirit and history. Religion as a collective structure no longer made sense, for no sooner had it emerged from its fragile shell than it was immediately co-opted by aggressive forms with which it was incompatible; but the Spirit, for its part, could transcend the gap between the two eras. The gap thus became the new schizophrenic order of our world, an order with which we had to come to terms, which we had to tame and tend to like a wound that, in the depths of our being, remains a source of tension and richness. The *double truth* thus became two orders of magnitude, superimposable but not interchangeable. The transition from one to the other implied, whatever may have been said, a *rupture* rather than an evolution. And it is because we have failed to recognise their fundamental incompatibility that we have arrived today at the phenomenon of hybridisation, which is probably one of the most disastrous consequences of unconscious Westernisation. But if, on the other hand, we could arrange for their coexistence, if we could place each in its proper place,

we might perhaps succeed in turning this gaping chasm into a shelter against a double peril: the reduction of hierohistory to history and of the latter to the former. In this way, we might one day succeed in saving the phenomenon of the world, knowing that there are other ways of perceiving and that there is also a perspective from which history can sometimes appear transfigured by the vision of the Angel.

Notes

I. THE PILGRIM OF THE WEST

I. A spiritual biography

1- ‘From Heidegger to Sohrawardî’, *L’Herne*, edited by Ch. Jambet, Paris, 1981, p. 24.

2- ‘Biographical Postscript to a Philosophical Interview’, *L’Herne*, p. 42.

3- “Aesthetica in Nuce”, translated by Corbin, *L’Herne*, p. 196.

4- “Biographical Postscript to a Philosophical Interview”, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

5- *Ibid*., p. 40.

6- *Ibid.*

7- *Ibid*., p. 41.

8- *Ibid*., p. 39.

9- *Ibid*., p. 40.

10- *Ibid.*

11- Rudolf Otto, **The Sacred: On the Irrational in the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational**, Munich, 1963, new edition, p. 31.

12- *Eranos Jahrbuch* XXXIII/1964, reprinted in *Face de Dieu, face de l’homme*, pp. 41–151.

13- ‘Henry Corbin: Protestant Theologian’, *L’Herne*, p. 187.

14- This refers to Karl Barth.

15- *Hic et Nunc* 1, November 1932, pp. 1–2.

16- “Biographical Postscript…”, *L’Herne*, p. 45.

17- Richard Stauffer, “Henry Corbin, Protestant Theologian”, *L’Herne*, p. 189.

18- ‘Biographical Postscript…’, *L’Herne*, p. 45.

19- *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, translated by Jean Lacoste, Paris, 1972, vol. II, p. 131.

20- “Biographical Postscript…”, *L’Herne*, p. 43.

21- Corbin had also practised Russian.

22- *Philosophical and Political Profiles*, trans. by F. Dastur, J.-R. Ladmiral and M. de Launay, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, pp. 23–24.

23- Quoted by Wilhelm Weischedel: ‘Philosophical Theology in the Shadow of Nihilism!’, in **Nihilism as a Phenomenon of Intellectual History in the Academic Debate of Our Century*;* ed. by Dieter Arendt, Darmstadt, 1974, p. 16.

24- Henri Stierlin, *Isfahan, Images of Paradise*, preface by H. Corbin, Bibliothèque des Arts, Lausanne/Paris, 1978, p. 6.

25- *Ibid.*

26- *Ibid*., p. 10.

27- Daryush Shayegan, 'The Man with the Magic Lamp', in *Essays in Honour of Henry Corbin*, Tehran, 1977.

28- Publication of the Society of Iranian Studies, No. 3, Tehran, 1946.

29- 'Biographical Postscript…', *L'Herne*, p. 47.

30- *Ibid.*

31- *Active Humanism, Essays on Art and Literature in Honour of Julien Cain*, Paris, 1968.

32- *Ibid*., p. 309.

33- 'The Meaning of Ta'wîl', *L'Herne*, pp. 84–85.

34- "Biographical Postscript…", *L'Herne*, p. 47.

35- 'From Iran to Eranos', *L'Herne*, p. 261.

36- 'Le Temps d'Eranos', *L'Herne*, p. 258.

37- 'The Eternal Sophia. On a book by C.G. Jung', in *Revue de culture européenne*, no. 5, vol. 3, 1st quarter 1953, Paris, pp. 11–44.

38- "Biographical Postscript…", *L'Herne*, p. 48.

39- Afterword by H. Corbin in C.G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 1964, p. 249.

40- *Ibid.*

41- C.G. Jung, *Man in Search of His Soul*, Paris, 1962, pp. 60–70; *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Paris, 1963, p. 171.

42- 'Traumsymbole des Individuationsprozesses', in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1936, pp. 13–14.

43- Erich Neumann, 'Der mystische Mensch', in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1948.

44- *Ibid*., p. 329.

45- D. Shayegan, 'From Pre-eternity to Post-eternity, the Cycle of Being', in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1981, pp. 108–109.

46- 'Biographical Postscript…', *L'Herne*, p. 48.

47- *Ibid*., p. 49.

48- *Ibid.*

49- *Does the global impact of Western thought make a genuine dialogue between civilisations possible?*, published by the Iranian Centre for the Study of Civilisations, Berg International, Paris, 1979, p. 401.

II. Hermeneutics and Heidegger

50- 'From Heidegger to Sohrawardî', *op. cit*., p. 24.

51- *Ibid*.

52- *Ibid.*

53- 'Dialectical Theology and History', *op. cit*., p. 268.

54- *What is Metaphysics?*, trans. H. Corbin, Paris, Gallimard, 1938, p. 14.

55- ‘From Heidegger to Sohrawardî’, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

56- ‘Being and Time’, in *What is Metaphysics?*, p. 176.

57- ‘From Heidegger to Sohrawardî’, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

58- *Ibid.*

59- *What is Metaphysics?*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

60- *Ibid*., p. 122.

61- *Ibid*., p. 143.

62- *Ibid*., p. 145.

63- *Ibid.*

64- *Ibid*., p. 159.

65- *Ibid*., p. 161.

66- *Ibid*., p. 162.

67- *Ibid*., p. 163.

68- *Ibid*., p. 33.

69- *Ibid*., p. 34.

70- *Ibid.*

71- *Ibid*., p. 35.

72- I would like to emphasise, however, that the meditations of the late Heidegger—notably the shift in emphasis from Dasein to Being, which was interpreted as a Return, and the introduction of concepts such as the Forgetting of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*), ontological difference and the Shepherd of Being: Shepherd of Being, did not attract Corbin’s attention. Whilst acknowledging that Heidegger’s thought took on an increasingly theological and even mystical dimension, Corbin considered that he had still not discovered the *mundus imaginalis*, that is to say, the ontological foundation of the world of Archetypal Images. In this sense, Corbin always remained a staunch Platonist.

73- *What is Metaphysics?*, p. 136.

III. Corbin and the Iranian World

74- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, pp. 22–23.

75- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. I, p. 140.

76- *Ibid.*

IV. The Metaphysics of the Imagination

77- *Orient*, no. 39 (3rd quarter 1966), p. 70.

78- We shall see how, for example, from Avicenna’s triple meditation on the First Intellect, the Second Intellect, the Celestial Soul and Heaven respectively emerge. These Celestial Souls thus constitute the second angelic hierarchy in the procession of the ten Intellects, and their world is that of the Active Imagination. Avicenna’s cosmology presents itself as ‘a phenomenology of angelic consciousness’ (*Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 164). It is therefore inextricably linked to an angelology, which in turn forms the basis of a gnoseology, upon which anthropology also depends. In this way, everything is harmoniously integrated into a distinct metaphysical framework. Furthermore, a series of correspondences is established between the dual hierarchy of the Intelligences, the Souls and the Heavens, and the faculties of man. Each human soul stands in the same relationship to the human Intelligence as each celestial Soul does

the Intelligence from which it proceeds.

79- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 17.

80- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 384.

81- *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, p. 8.

82- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 27.

83- *Ibid*., p. 18.

84- *Sâheb-e nazar, in* D. Shayegan, 'The Visionary Topography of Hafez of Shiraz', *Cahiers de l'U.S.J.J*. no. 7, Paris, Berg International, 1981.

85- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 229.

86- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, pp. 11–12.

87- *Ibid*., p. 13.

88- *Ibid.*

89- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 384.

90- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 21.

91- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 102.

92- *Ibid.*

V. Corbin's Four Paths in the Iranian-Islamic World

93- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 208.

94- A. Gide, *Offrande lyrique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 28.

II. FROM THE CYCLE OF PROPHECY (*NOBOWWAT*) TO THE CYCLE OF INITIATION (*WALÂYAT*)

I. The phenomenon of the Holy Book

95- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 222.

96- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 45.

97- *Ibid*., pp. 41–51.

II. Prophecy and Walâyat *(Imâmat)*

98- *Sharh-e Golshan-e Râz*, Tehran, 1337.

99- D. Shayegan, *Hinduism and Sufism*, La Différence, Paris, 1979, pp. 184–198.

100- There is absolute (*motlaq*) prophecy and particular (*moqayyad*) prophecy. The former is specific to the Muhammadian Reality, and the latter comprises the prophets prior to Muhammad.

101- *Sharh-e Goishan-e Râz*, p. 315.

102- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. I, p. 259.

103- *Sharh-e Golshan-e Râz*, p. 276.

104- A native of Ray (Raghès) near Tehran; compiler of thousands of traditions (*hadith* and *ahbâr*) which form the oldest *corpus* of Shia traditions.

105- *Sharh-e Golshan-e Râz*, p. 48.

106- For the various possible forms of diagrams, see *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 273.

107- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 56.

108- 'Prophecy and Imamat (or *walâyat*) correspond to a dual cosmic movement: *mabda'* and *ma'âd*, genesis and return, descent and ascent to the origin. This dual movement corresponds, on the one hand, to *tanzîl*, Revelation, which is the act of bringing *down* the Holy Book, the letter of which (the *sharî'at*…) the prophet is charged with proclaiming; and on the other hand, *ta'wîl*, which is the act of *guiding* the letter of Revelation back to its true meaning, *a* spiritual *exegesis* which is the ministry of the Imam. This true meaning is the spiritual meaning, the *haqîqat* or the Idea. As Nâsir-e Khosraw (11th century), one of Iran's greatest Ismaili theosophers, wrote: "Positive religion (*sharî'at*) is the exoteric aspect of the spiritual Idea (*haqîqat*), and the spiritual Idea is the esoteric aspect of positive religion; positive religion is the symbol (*mathal*), the spiritual Idea is the symbolised (*mamthûl)*". *"The Face of God, the Face of Man*", p. 109.

109- *Temple and Contemplation*, p. 7.

110- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 198.

111- *In Iranian Islam*, III, pp. 279–280.

112- *Ibid*., p. 281.

113- *Ibid*., pp. 281–282.

114- For the symbolism of black light, see *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, pp. 149–164. And on the symbolism of colours in general, see *Temple and Contemplation*, pp. 7–48.

115- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 290.

116- *The Crimson Archangel*, pp. 273–280.

III. Prophetic Philosophy

117- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 46.

118- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy…*, p. 39.

119- *Ibid*., p. 40.

120- *Ibid*., p. 42.

121- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 223.

122- *Ibid*., p. 223.

123- *Ibid*., p. 246.

124- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy…*, pp. 39–43.

125- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, pp. 148–149.

126- *Ibid*., p. 109.

127- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 223.

128- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 169.

129- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabî*, p. 29.

130- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 252.

131- *Ibid.*

132- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy…*, p. 264.

133- A very interesting idea, as it demonstrates that a philosophy devoid of *the intermediate world*, of Images, loses the *meaning* of symbols and transforms all new data into allegories, hence the confusion between allegory and symbol, which is one of Corbin’s favourite themes.

134- These final words refer to the spiritual initiation incumbent upon the ‘Friends of God’ (Awlîya’), who are the holy Imams whose lineage goes back to ‘Alî ibn Abî Tâlib.

135- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy…*, p. 265.

136- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. I, p. 302.

137- *Ibid.*

IV. Shi’ism

138- *In Iranian Islam*, I, pp. 114–115.

139- *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 70.

140- *Ibid.*, I, p. 40.

141- *Ibid.*, IV, p. 328.

142- *Ibid.*

143- *Ibid.*, III, p. 151.

144- *Ibid.*, I, p. 92.

145- These ‘six days’ are units of qualitative time; as such, they are the qualitative units of time in hierohistory.
See also: ‘The Ismaili Initiation or Esotericism and the Word’ in *Man and His Angel*, pp. 103–106.

146- *The Book Uniting the Two Wisdoms*, pp. 125–126.

147- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 297.

148- *Ibid.*

149- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 337.

150- For Swedenborg’s *six-day* account of the creation of the spiritual man, see **The Face of God, the Face of Man**, pp. 73–99.

151- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 120.

152- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 264.

153- *Alchemy as a Hieratic Art*, pp. 162–163.

154- *Temple and Contemplation*, p. 191.

155- *Alchemy as a Hieratic Art*, p. 169.

156- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 93.

157- *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 71.

158- *Ibid.*, I, p. 93.

159- *Ibid.*, I, p. 94.

160- *Ibid.*, III, p. 10.

161- *Ibid.*, I, p. 41.

162- *Ibid.*, I, p. 42.

163- *Ibid.*, I, pp. XXVIII–XXIX.

164- *Ibid.*, I, pp. 89–90.

165- *Ibid.*

166- *Ibid.*, p. 90.

167- *Ibid.*

168- *The Book Combining the Two Wisdoms*, pp. 62–63.

169- 'On the Twelfth Imam', *Round Table*, Feb. 1957, p. 19.

170- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 132.

171- Sayyed Haydar Amolî: 'The Text of Texts' (*Nass al-Nosûs*), Prolegomena published with a double introduction by Henry Corbin and Osman Yahia, Bibliothèque iranienne, 21, Tehran-Paris, 1975.

172- Sayyed Haydar Amolî: *Shi'ite Philosophy;* 1) The Compendium of Esoteric Doctrines (*Jâmi' al-Asrâr*), 2) Treatise on the Knowledge of Being (*Fî Ma'rifat al-Wojûd*) by Henry Corbin and Osman Yahia, Iranian Library, 16, Tehran-Paris, 1969.

173- *Jâmi al-asrâr*, trans. in *En Islam iranien*, III, p. 179.

174- *In En Islam iranien*, III, p. VI.

175- *Ibid.*, III, pp. 15–16.

176- *Ibid.*

177- *Ibid.*, III, p. X.

178- *Ibid.*, III, pp. 168–169.

179- *Ibid.*, I, p. 92.

180- *Ibid.*, I, p. 91.

181- *Ibid.*, I, p. XXIX.

V. Imamology

182- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. I, p. 305.

183- *Ibid.*, p. 307.

184- *Ibid.*

185- *Ibid.*, p. 230.

186- ‘We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. But man undertook it; he is indeed violent and ignorant’ (Qur’an 33:72).

187- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 98.

188- *Ibid.*, p. 300.

189- *Ibid.*, IV, p. 166.

190- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 294.

191- *Ibid.*, p. 246.

192- On the symbolism of the Green Island, see *In Iranian Islam*, IV, pp. 346–367.

193- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 270.

194- *Ibid.*, p. 314.

195- *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 102.

196- The three testimonies are, respectively, the Testimony of the Oneness of God, of the Prophetic Message and of the Imamate according to the Shia. For the Sunnis, therefore, the first two Testimonies suffice.

197- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 128.

VI. The Twelve Imams, the formative structure of the temple of prophecy

198- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 64.

199- On the succession of the twelve Imams, see *In Iranian Islam*, I, pp. 66–68.

200- *Ibid.*, p. 63.

201- *Temple and Contemplation*, p. 239.

202- *Ibid.*, p. 223.

203- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 56.

204- *Ibid.*, p. 57.

205- *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 304.

206- These accounts are based on contemporary eyewitnesses who took part in the events. Corbin drew on the writings of the great theologian Ibn Babûyeh of Qom, known as Saykh Sadûq (*In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 310).

207- *Ibid.*, IV, p. 313.

208- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 343.

209- *Ibid.*, pp. 345–346.

210- *Ibid.*, p. 344.

211- Insofar as the parousia of the Twelfth Imam, who is both Paraclete (*Fâraqlît*) and Saoshyant, dictates the concept of the periods of this cyclical time, Iranian philosophy may be in harmony with the ideas that emerged precisely during Sohrawardî’s own era. The reign of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, shaped the historiosophical vision of Joachim of Fiore and the Joachimites in the 12th century. See *Face of God, Face of Man*, pp. 311–345.

212- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 127.

213- *Ibid.*

214- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 1104–1105.

215- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 410.

216- See *In Iranian Islam*, IV, pp. 415–416.

217- *Ibid*., p. 409.

218- *Ibid*., p. 460; see also 'Youth and Chivalry in Iranian Islam' in *Man and His Angel*, pp. 207–260.

VII. Ismailism

219- Iranian Library, vol. 1, Tehran/Paris, 1949.

220- Iranian Library, vol. 3, Tehran/Paris, 1953.

221- *Ibid*., vol. 6, 1955.

222- *Ibid*., vol. 9, 1961.

223- *Ismaili Trilogy*, p. 3.

224- Berg International, Paris, 1982.

225- Fayard, Paris, 1983.

226- In addition to Corbin's work on Ismailism, there are his lectures at the École pratique des hautes études: on Hamîdoddîn Kermânî in 1956, 57 and 58; on Qâzî No'mân (*Kitâb asâs al-ta'wîl*) in 1964; on Idris Imâdoddîn (Yemeni Ismailism) in 1971.

227- *The Book Combining the Two Wisdoms*, p. 60.

228- *Ibid*., pp. 5–6.

229- *History of Islamic Philosophy* 1, p. 110.

230- 'On the Twelfth Imam', *op. cit*., p. 12.

231- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, pp. 298–299.

232- 'On the Twelfth Imam', *op. cit*., p. 12.

233- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 138.

234- *Ibid*., p. 111.

235- *Ibid*., p. 113.

236- *Ibid.*

237- *In Iranian Islam*, 1, p. 77.

238- *The Book Combining the Two Wisdoms*, p. 7.

239- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 1, p. 140.

240- *The Book Uniting the Two Wisdoms*, p. 8.

241- *Ibid*., p. 9.

242- This text was published after the book was written: Abû Ya'qûb Sejestânî, *The Unveiling of Hidden Things*, Verdier, 1988.

243- *Ibid*., p. 18.

244- *Ibid*., p. 17.

245- *History of Islamic Philosophy* I, p. 119.

246- *Ibid*., p. 122.

247- See the article: 'On Apophatic Theology as an Antidote to Nihilism', in *The Paradox of Monotheism.*

248- *The Book Uniting the Two Wisdoms*, p. 60.

III. FROM THE METAPHYSICS OF ESSENCES TO THE THEOSOPHY OF PRESENCE

I. Averroism and Avicennism

249- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 126.

250- *Ibid.*

II. Avicenna or a strongly Neoplatonised Aristotelianism

251- The Sunni *kalâm* theologian al-Ash'ârî died in 935. The philosopher Fârâbî, known as the 'second master' (after Aristotle), had passed away thirty years before Avicenna's birth. Shaykh Sadûq ibn Bâbûyeh (991) and Shaykh Mofîd (1022) formed the *corpus* of the Imams of Twelver Shi'ism. Avicenna was also a contemporary of *the* Ismaili *corpus* in Arabic and Persian, in which the gnosis and theosophy of this particular branch of Shia Islam, known as Ismailism, were developed. It is also known that his parents were of the Ismaili faith.

252- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 164.

253- These are: 1) his contemplation of the essence of the Necessary Being; 2) the contemplation of his own essence, which is necessary by virtue of God's Necessary Being, which endows him with being or necessitates his being; 3) the contemplation of his own essence as a possible being, which is its aspect of shadow and non-Being.

254- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 84.

255- *Ibid*., p. 60.

256- *Ibid*., p. 68.

257- *Ibid*., p. 131.

258- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 115.

259- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 85.

260- *Ibid.*

261- *Ibid*., p. 92.

262- *Kitâb al-Shifâ'* I, 361.

263- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 284.

264- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 129.

265- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 36.

III. Latin Avicennism

266- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 117.

267- *Ibid*., p. 298.

268- 'Avicenna', in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, p. 253.

IV. Sohrawardî and 'Eastern' theosophy

269- "From Heidegger to Sohravardî", *L'Herne*.

270- In addition to critical editions of his major works such as the *Hikmat al-Ishrâq* (*Opera metaphysica*, vols. I and II), Corbin produced a masterful translation of his visionary narratives, which appeared under the title *The Crimson Archangel*. He also translated the *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, the Shaykh's principal philosophical work, which was published under the care of Christian Jambet: *The Book of Eastern Wisdom*, with commentaries by Qotboddîn Shîrâzî and Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî, Verdier, 1986.

271- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 35.

272- *Ibid*., pp. 36–37.

273- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 170.

274- *Ibid*., p. 172.

V. The Convergence of Philosophy and Mystical Experience

275- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 335.

276- *Prolégomènes* I, p. 32.

277- *Prolégomènes* I, pp. XXXI–XXXIII.

278- *Ibid*., p. XXXII.

279- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 40.

280- *Ibid*., p. 63.

281- *Prologues* I, pp. XXXIV–XXXV.

282- *Prologues* I, p. XXXV.

283- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 290–291.

284- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 404.

285- *Ibid*., pp. 375–376.

286- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 136.

287- *Islamic Iranian Philosophy*, pp. 352–353.

VI. Mollâ Sadrâ or the Theosophy of Presence as Testimony

288- Canonical law (*fiqh*), the *tafsîr* of the Qur'an, the science of *hadîths* or traditions of the holy Imâms, the science of *rijâl* (the men who transmitted them). He obtained from the Shaykh the *ijâzat* or licence entitling him to teach. Cf. *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 4.

289- Mîr Dâmâd, just like his illustrious predecessor Sohrawardî, maintained that philosophy unaccompanied by spiritual realisation

is a futile endeavour, and that a mystical experience not underpinned by a solid philosophical grounding leads to the mind straying from the right path.

290- See also: Daryush Shayegan, *Hinduism and Sufism*, Paris, Éditions de la Différence, 1979.

291- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 59.

292- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, pp. 17–18.

293- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 76.

294- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 11.

295- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, pp. 61–62.

296- According to Corbin's catalogue, this body of work comprises just over forty titles. Corbin devoted many pages of insightful analysis to Mulla Sadra. Not only did he translate **The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations** with a substantial introduction on the vocabulary of Being and the multiple connotations that this term carries in Sadra's thought, but he also returned to the same author in the introduction to *the Anthology of Iranian Philosophers*, published in collaboration with Seyyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî, as well as in Volume IV of *En Islam iranien*. Regarding the substance of Sadrâ's thought, he states: 'The consistent mode of thought that emerges from it is this *Hikmat ilâhîya*, Divine Wisdom, which our annotations on *the Kitâb al-Mashâ'ir* will have occasion to recall here: it is, strictly speaking, neither what we commonly refer to as theology, nor what we refer to as philosophy, but etymologically *theo-sophia*. It is a mode of thought that arises specifically within a prophetic religion, a spiritual community gathered around the Holy Book revealed by a prophet…' (*The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 9).

297- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 64. The first of these four spiritual journeys begins in the created world and leads to God (*mina'l-khalq ilâ'l-Haqq*). The second journey is a pilgrimage from God, in God and through God (*fi'l-Haqq bi'l-Haqq*). Here the *sâlik* (pilgrim) remains at the level of pure metaphysics: Divine Essence, Divine Name, Attribute, etc. The third journey takes place mentally in the reverse order of the first (*mina'l-Haqq ilâ'l-khalq bi'l-Haqq)*; it therefore deals with cosmogony and angelology. Finally, the fourth journey is accomplished 'with God' or 'through God' within the created world itself (*bi'l-Haqq fi'l-khalq*). This is the initiation into the perspectives of eschatology, the Interworlds and the Great Return.

298- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, pp. 67–68.

299- *L'Herne*, p. 50.

300- *The Relevance of Traditional Philosophy in Iran*, p. 6.

301- *Ibid.*

VII. Priority of existence

302- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 74.

303- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p. 54.

304- *Ibid*., p. 52.

305- *Ibid*., p. 51.

306- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 78.

307- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 38.

308- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 170.

309- *Ibid*., p. 104.

310- *Ibid.*

311- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, II, p. 1161.

VIII. Intrasubstantial Movement

312- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 233.

313- *Ibid.*, p. 232.

314- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 79.

315- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 236.

316- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 95.

317- *Ibid.*, p. 89.

318- *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

319- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 228.

IX. Unification of the perceiving subject with the perceived form

320- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p. 81.

321- *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

322- *Ibid.*

323- *Ibid.*

324- *Ibid.*, p. 73.

325- *Ibid.*, p. 76.

X. The Imaginal and the World of the Soul

326- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, pp. 59–60.

327- *In Iranian Islam*, I, p. 243.

328- *Iranian Islamic Philosophy in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, p. 77.

329- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 102.

330- *Ibid.*

331- *Ibid.*, p. 98.

332- *Ibid.*, p. 97.

333- *Ibid.*, p. 94.

334- *Ibid.*, p. 99.

335- *Ibid.*, p. 100.

336- *Ibid.*, p. 111.

XI. The Three Resurrections

337- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 77.

338- *Ibid*., I, p. 322.

339- *Ibid*., IV, p. 80.

340- *Ibid.*

341- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 79.

342- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 81.

343- *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 81.

344- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 117.

345- *Ibid.*

346- *Ibid*., p. 118.

347- *Ibid.*

348- *Ibid.*

349- *Ibid.*

350- Daryush Shayegan, *Hinduism and Sufism*, *op. cit*., pp. 209–210.

351- In *Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 110.

352- *Ibid*., p. 119.

353- *Ibid*., p. 121.

iv. FROM DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION TO VISIONARY NARRATIVE

I. Avicenna's 'Eastern' Philosophy

354- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 16.

355- *Ibid*., p. 17.

356- *Ibid*., p. 154.

357- *Ibid.*

358- *Ibid*., p. 155.

359- *Ibid*., p. 169.

360- *Ibid*., p. 170.

361- These two companions symbolise the left side, that is to say, the western shadow in the East of the soul. These are negative and demonic energies that encourage the 'earthly angels' to plunge into the hell of existence. They will reappear later, says Corbin, in the *Tale of Salâmân and Absâl*, this time typified in the figures of the cook and the butler.

362- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 157.

363- The Intermediate East lies between the sensible world and the world of the Intelligences; it is the world of *the imaginal*, where spirits take on corporeal form and bodies become spiritualised. It is here that the intelligible takes on symbolic form and the sensible is transformed into apparitional forms, and where the imagination acts as an organ of metamorphosis. The West, for its part, is situated 'on the left of the Cosmos'; it encompasses *the Far West* of non-being (that is to say, the deprivation of being), *the earthly West* where forms that have migrated and been exiled into Matter wage a merciless struggle, and *the celestial West* which encompasses the entire system of spheres and whose matter is subtle and

translucent. Here it is the celestial souls who, experiencing exile, feel alienated and are overcome by a longing for Return. This is ‘the world of the Sorrow of the Angels’ (cf. *ibid*., p. 177).

364- *Ibid*., p. 164.

365- The Source of Life, Corbin comments, is *the Aqua permanens*. It is divine gnosis (always associated with *Khezr*, the guide who appears in the works of Rûzbehân, Ibn ’Arabî and Sohrawardî). It is thus the *Philosophia prima*, and whoever purifies themselves in it and drinks from it will never again taste the bitterness of death. (*Ibid*., p. 157.)

366- *Ibid*., pp. 164–165.

367- Avicenna wrote this text in Arabic, accessible via the editions published by Mehren. There are four Persian translations: *Tarjamat lisân al-Haqq, wa howa risâlat al-Tayr:* Translation of the Divine Language, and it is the Epistle of the Bird.

368- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 194.

369- *Ibid*., pp. 198–199.

370- *Ibid*., pp. 204–205.

371- *Ibid*., p. 205.

372- *Ibid*., p. 207.

373- *Ibid*., p. 208.

374- The concept of the Messenger has a long lineage in visionary narratives. He is at once the *Rasûl karîm* in the Qur’an (8:19), the Angel Gabriel of prophetic revelations, and the Active Intellect of the philosophers, as well as the Young Sage whom the pilgrim encounters in the Land of Nowhere. In the Hermetic tradition, he is the ‘Perfect Nature’, both Angel of Knowledge and Angel of Revelation. To unite with him is to rise to the rank of the ‘Seal of Prophecy’. For, being the interpreter of mysteries, he is also that spiritual individuation which enables us to unite with our celestial archetype. Hence, too, his soteriological ‘mission’, which merges with the very eschatology of our final end.

375- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, pp. 213–214.

376- *Ibid.*

377- James Darmesteter, The *Zend-Avesta*, II, p. 495, n. 26.

378- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 215.

379- *Ibid*., p. 215.

380- *Ibid*., p. 217.

381- *Ibid*., p. 218.

382- *Ibid.*

383- *Ibid*., pp. 218–219; Corbin’s translation of lines 4205–4230.

384- *Ibid*., p. 220.

II. Avicenna and Sohrawardî

385- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 17.

386- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, I, p. 287.

387- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 50.

388- *History of Islamic Philosophy* I, p. 287.

389- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 273.

390- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 52.

III. Sohrawardî and Visionary Narratives

391- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 186.

392- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. II, pp. 162–163.

393- *Ibid*., Vol. I, p. 213.

394- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 197.

395- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. II, pp. 190–191.

396- *Ibid*., p. 194.

397- *Ibid*., p. 191.

398- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 187.

399- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 204.

400- *Ibid*., p. 269.

401- In the mythical sense, Qâf is the mountain range encircling the world, the one the Avesta calls *Haraiti Bareza* (Persian: Alborz). Geographically, it is the mountain range stretching across northern Iran. But here we are dealing with visionary geography. See *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 216.

402- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, pp. 11–12.

403- *Ibid*., pp. 12–13.

404- *Ibid*., p. 13.

405- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 384.

406- *Ibid*., p. 385.

407- In Sohrawardî's visionary accounts, it is in the *Khângâh* (Lodge of the Sufis) that the spiritual seeker withdraws: it is there that the encounter with the Angel takes place. The *Khângâh*, the sanctuary of the temple which is the microcosm, is situated at the 'confluence of the two seas' (*Temple and Contemplation*, p. 297).

408- The ten sages represent the procession of the ten Archangelic Intelligences, the tenth of which is the Active Intelligence or the humanised Angel.

409- *The Crimson Archangel*, pp. 228–229.

410- *Ibid*., p. 324.

411- *Ibid*., p. 337.

412- *Ibid*., p. 168.

413- *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, p. 38.

414- *Ibid.*

IV. Western Exile (an initiatory hikâyat*)*

415- The *Tale of Western Exile*, just like the tales of *The Crimson Archangel* or the *Vade-mecum of the Faithful of Love*, the

The Language of Ants and The Incantation of the Simorgh, illustrate how doctrine becomes an event of the soul.

416- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 274.

417- *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, pp. 43–44.

418- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 270.

419- *Ibid*., p. 275.

420- *Ibid*., p. 276.

421- *Ibid.*

422- *Ibid*., p. 270.

423- *Ibid*., p. 276.

424- *Ibid*., p. 307.

425- *Ibid*., p. 311.

426- *Ibid.*

427- *Ibid*., p. 278.

428- *Ibid*., p. 279.

V. The encounter with the personal angel (process of individuation)

429- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 321.

430- *Ibid*., p. XIX.

431- Sohrawardî also identifies the Angel Gabriel with the Angel Sroasha (Pahlavi, *serosh*) of the Avesta. Although not one of the seven Amahraspands, Sroasha is a leading figure among the *Dii Angeli*, the *Yazds* of the Avesta. Through this equivalence, a link is established between Biblical-Quranic angelology and the angelology of the Zoroastrian Neoplatonists of *the Ishrâq.*

432- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 260.

433- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 386.

434- *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 34.

435- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 261.

436- *Ibid*., pp. 261–262.

437- *Ibid*., p. 298.

438- *The Crimson Archangel*, pp. 202–203.

439- *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 148.

VI. From the Heroic Epic to the Mystical Epic

440- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, p. 170.

441- *In Iranian Islam*, II, pp. 139–140.

442- *Ibid*., pp. 244–245.

443- *In Iranian Islam*, IV, p. 391.

444- *Ibid*., p. 391.

445- *Ibid*., pp. 429–430.

446- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, pp. 205–206.

447- *Ibid*., p. 207.

448- *Ibid*., pp. 207–208.

449- *Ibid*., p. 208.

450- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 147.

451- *Zoroastrian Motifs in the Philosophy of Shaykh al-Ishrâq*, pp. 41–42.

452- In the text of *the Shahnâmeh*, it is *Sorûsh*, the Messenger, the equivalent of Gabriel, who fulfils this role.

453- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 113.

454- *The Face of God, the Face of Man*, pp. 210–212.

455- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 423.

456- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. II, p. 206. This cup is also referred to as the 'Grail of Jamshid' (*Jâm-e Jam*), that is to say, the Cup of Jamshîd (Jamshîd is the Persian equivalent of *Yima*, the mythical ruler, who in the Avesta was ordered to erect in *Erân-Vêj* the *Var* or enclosure that bears so many similarities to Kang Dêz, the paradise of Siyâvash, father of Kay Khosraw).

457- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 434.

458- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 161.

VII. The Transfigured Eros

459- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 362.

460- There is a whole series of symbols of Iranian origin in Sohrawardî and other Iranian mystical authors, which Corbin has termed '*Mazdeanising symbols*'. Cf. *In Iranian Islam*, III, pp. 103–104.

461- *Ibid*., II, p. 371.

462- *Ibid*., pp. 371–372.

463- *The Crimson Archangel*, pp. 302–303.

464- *Ibid*., p. 299.

465- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 372.

466- The Persian form of the name Mithra, meaning both 'Sun' and 'Love'.

467- *The Crimson Archangel*, pp. 306–307.

468- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 374.

469- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 313.

V. FROM HUMAN LOVE TO DIVINE LOVE

I. Rûzbehân or the Master of Inspired Paradoxes

470- The famous author of *the Mathnawî* in Persian, which would later be recognised by the great masters of Iranian Sufism as the Persian Qur'an.

471- *The Jasmine of the Faithful in Love*, pp. 30–31.

472- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. VII.

473- *Ibid*., p. 45.

474- *Ibid*., p. 47.

475- *Ibid*., p. 51.

476- *The Jasmine of the Faithful in Love*, p. 36.

477- *Ibid*., p. 37.

478- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 51.

479- *Ibid*., p. 52.

480- *Ibid*., p. 71.

481- *Ibid*., pp. 21–22.

482- *Comments on the Paradoxes of the Sufis*, pp. 3–4.

483- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 19.

484- *Ibid*., p. 19.

485- *Avicenna and the Visionary Narrative*, p. 40.

486- *Ibid*., p. 40.

487- *Ibid*., pp. 40–41.

II. Clouding and the Trial of the Veil

488- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 138.

489- There existed, or poetic tradition holds that there existed, in Southern Arabia, in Yemen, an ideal tribe, famous for the practice of a platonic and chaste love known as *'Odhrite* love. The Majnûn-Layla couple would be the Northern Arabian counterpart of these ideal figures celebrated by the poets of Southern Arabia *(ibid.)*.

490- *The Jasmine of the Faithful in Love*, p. 13.

491- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 31.

492- *Ibid*., p. VII.

493- *Ibid*., p. VIII.

494- *Ibid.*, p. 128.

495- *The Jasmine of the Faithful of Love*, p. 87.

496- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 39.

497- Our emphasis.

498- *The Jasmine of the Believers in Love*, pp. 112–115.

III. The Inner Pilgrimage

499- *In Iranian Islam*, III, pp. 81–82.

500- *The Jasmine of the Faithful of Love*, chap. XXX, § 271 – trans. *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 87.

501- *Ibid.*, V, § 97 – trans. *ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

502- *Ibid.*, V, § 601 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 84.

503- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 80.

504- *The Jasmine of the Believers in Love*, chap. X, § 121 – trans. *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 85.

505- *Ibid.*, chap. X, § 122 – trans. *ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

506- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 79.

507- *The Jasmine of the Faithful of Love*, chap. V, § 74 – trans. *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 88.

508- *Ibid.*, § 97 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 89.

509- *Ibid.*, § 73 – trans. *ibid.*

510- *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 94.

511- *The Jasmine of the Faithful in Love*, chap. V, § 80 – trans. *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 95.

512- *Ibid.*, chap. V, § 81 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 95.

513- *Ibid.*, chap. IV, § 54 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 92.

514- *Ibid.*, chap. V, § 55 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 93.

515- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 1100.

516- Quoted by H. Corbin in *En Islam iranien*, III, p. 59.

517- *The Jasmine of the Believers in Love*, chap. VI, gloss 38 – trans. *In Iranian Islam*, III, p. 100.

518- *Ibid.*, chap. VI, § 94 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 100.

519- *Ibid.*, chap. VI, § 64 – trans. *ibid.*, p. 101.

520- *In Iranian Islam*, III, pp. 57–58.

521- *Ibid.*, p. 49.

522- *The Jasmine of the Faithful in Love*, chap. X, § 125 – trans. *in *En Islam iranien**, III, p. 105.

523- Quoted by Corbin in *On Iranian Islam*, III, p. 105.

524- *Ibid.*, p. 67.

525- *Ibid*., pp. VI–VII.

526- *Ibid*., pp. 67–68.

527- *Ibid*., p. 144.

528- *Ibid*., p. 17. The unity of the Lover and the Beloved is a duality (*dû'î*, Persian), not a duality. For he is 'a Single One and a Single One who, by multiplying one by the other, are *a* Single One'. This is the secret of esoteric unity, where the Lover becomes the partner of the eternal Bride. And 'behold, this man of desire becomes the partner of a bride such as you, for to those who seek divine intimacy, it is you who are the place of intimacy; you are, for those who truly understand what moves their desire, the blossoming flower in the garden of mystical knowledge" (Rûzbehân, *The Jasmine of the Believers in Love*, chap. XXXI, §§ 274–275).

529- *In Iranian Islam*, III, pp. 131–134.

530- *Ibid.*, p. 130.

531- *Ibid*., p. 133; cf. also *ibid*., p. 81.

532- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, p. 25.

533- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 132.

534- *Ibid*., pp. 140–141.

535- *Ibid*., p. 143.

536- *Ibid.*

537- *Ibid*., p. 77.

538- *Ibid*., p. 78.

539- *Ibid*., p. 140.

540- *Ibid.*

IV. Inspired paradoxes

541- On the meaning of this word in Abû Nasr Sarrâj, *see Comments on the Paradoxes of the Sufis*, p. 7.

542- *Ibid.*

543- *Ibid*., p. 9.

544- *Ibid*., p. 10.

545- *Ibid*., p. 15.

546- *Ibid*., p. 18.

547- *In Iranian Islam*, Vol. III, p. 56.

548- *Ibid.*

549- *Ibid*., p. 123.

V. Ibn 'Arabî and the Creative Imagination

550- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 1106.

551- *The Jasmine of the Believers in Love*, p. 23.

552- *The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, pp. 34–35.

553- *Ibid*., p. 30.

554- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, II, p. 1116.

555- For details of this encounter, see *The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, pp. 39–40.

556- *Ibid*., p. 40.

557- *Ibid.*

558- *Ibid*., p. 48.

559- *Ibid*., p. 47.

560- *Ibid.*

561- *Ibid*., p. 110.

562- *Ibid*., p. 111.

563- *Ibid.*

564- *Ibid*., p. 112.

565- *Ibid*., p. 113.

566- *The Crimson Archangel*, p. 211.

567- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 32. The *Owaysîs* probably owe their name to a Yemeni ascetic, Oways al-Qaranî, a contemporary of the Prophet, whom he knew without ever having seen him in person. The Prophet, for his part, knew him without having met him, and it is to him that he is said to have alluded in this *hadith*: 'I feel the breath of the Merciful coming from the direction of Yemen. ' Thus, all Sufis who have no flesh-and-blood *murshid* (guide) claim the title *of Owaysîs*. The example of *the Owaysîs* is common in the spiritual history of Islam.

568- *Ibid*., p. 56.

569- *Ibid*., p. 50.

570- *Ibid*., p. 53.

571- *Ibid*., p. 54.

572- *Ibid*., p. 50.

573- *Ibid*., pp. 50–51.

574- *Ibid*., p. 56.

VI. Theophany, the primordial cloud and the divine names

575- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 93.

576- *Ibid*., p. 144.

577- *Ibid.*

578- *Fotûhât* II, p. 125.

579- *The Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 94.

580- The Fixed Essences, or ‘eternal essences’, as Corbin calls them, are indistinguishable from the Names, just as the latter are indistinguishable from the Essence, since this level is the plane of the esoteric (*inner*) Name and the world of the Unseen (*’âlam al-ghayb*) or the level of negative theology (*tanzîh*), where every Attribute, whatever its degree, is deemed unworthy of God except for God’s Knowledge of His own Selfhood.

581- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ’Arabî*, p. 151.

582- *Ibid*., p. 173.

583- Shamsoddîn Mohammad Lâhîjî, *Sharh-e Golsham-e Râz*, commentary on the philosophical poem by Mahmûd Shabestarî, Tehran, 1377 AH, p. 212.

584- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ’Arabî*, pp. 98–99.

585- *Ibid*., p. 94.

586- Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî, *Commentary on Qaysarî’s Introduction to Islamic Sufism*, Mashhad, 1344 AH.

VII. Creative Imagination as Theophany

587- *Creative imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ’Arabî*, p. 141.

588- *Ibid*., p. 169.

589- *Ibid*., p. 170.

590- *Ibid.*

591- *Ibid*., p. 150.

592- *Ibid*., p. 160.

593- *Ibid*., p. 161.

594- *Ibid.*

595- *Ibid*., p. 101.

596- *Ibid*., p. 153.

597- *Ibid*., p. 205.

598- *Ibid*., p. 124.

599- *Ibid.*

600- *Ibid.*

601- Reference to the Qur’anic verse, *ibid*., p. 125.

602- I*bid*., p. 125. Emphasis added.

603- *Ibid*., p. 126.

604- *Ibid*., p. 128.

VII. The Religion of Love

605- *Fosûs…*, p. 203.

606- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ’Arabî*, p. 118.

607- *Ibid*., p. 118.

608- *Ibid*., p. 119.

609- *Ibid*., p. 120.

610- *Ibid*., pp. 120–121.

611- *Ibid*., p. 108.

612- *Ibid*., p. 109.

Conclusion

613- This is the title of an article we wrote some time ago on the same subject, which appeared in **Études philosophiques**, no. 1, 1980. Some of the arguments from that article have been taken up here for the conclusion of this book.

614- Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. André Préau, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 66.

615- 'The Relevance of Traditional Philosophy in Iran', *Acta Iranica*, I, Tehran, Jan–Mar 1968, p. 2.

616- *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 48.

617- *Temple and Contemplation*, pp. 69–70.

618- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 162.

619- *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 78.

620- *Ibid.*

621- *In Iranian Islam*, II, p. 365.

622- 'And if the novel abandons us', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 28 August 1983.

623- *History of Islamic Philosophy*, I, p. 343.

624- *Ibid*., pp. 340–341.

625- Giuseppe Tucci, *Practical Theory of the Mandala*, trans. André Padu, Paris, Fayard, 1974, p. 11.

626- Daryush Shayegan, *What Is a Religious Revolution?*, Presses d'aujourd'hui, Paris, 1982, p. 15.

627- Trans. Éliane Kaufholz, Paris, Gallimard, 1974.

628- Max Horkheimer, 'Critical Theory: Yesterday and Today', in *Critical Theory*, trans. Luc Ferry, Paris, Payot, 1978, p. 361.

629- *The Paradox of Monotheism*, pp. 227–229, and *Iranian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy*, p. 173.

630- D. Shayegan, *What Is a Religious Revolution?*, *op. cit*., pp. 198–199.

631- *The Principle of Reason*, *op. cit*., p. 192.

632- Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, Pfullinger, 1975, p. 58.

633- Daryush Shayegan, 'The Relevance of Henry Corbin's Thought', *op. cit.*, p. 68.

634- D. Shayegan, *What is a Religious Revolution?*, *op. cit*., p. 239.

635- *Ibid*., p. 129.

636- Le Seuil, Paris, 1983.

637- *The Logic of the Orientals*, p. 22.

638- *Ibid*., p. 283.

639- *Ibid*., p. 292.

Interested readers will find a comprehensive bibliography of Henry Corbin's works in issue 39 of **Cahiers de l'Herne**, which is devoted to him.

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Table of Contents

Copyright Page Table of Contents
BOOK I - The Pilgrim from the West
- CHAPTER I - A Spiritual Biography CHAPTER II - Hermeneutics and Heidegger CHAPTER III - Corbin and the Iranian World CHAPTER IV - The Metaphysics of the Imagination
  - 1) An Intermediate World of Images
  - 2) The World of the Imaginal and the Science of Mirrors
  - 3) The Reversal of Time and Space
  - 4) The Post-Mortem Otherworld of Imaginal Forms
- CHAPTER V – Corbin's Four Journeys through the Iranian-Islamic World BOOK II – From the Cycle of Prophecy (Nobowwat) to the Cycle of Initiation (Walâyat)
- CHAPTER I - The Phenomenon of the Holy Book
- CHAPTER II - Prophecy and Walâyat (Imâmat)
  - 1) The Cycle of Prophecy
  - 2) The Prophet of Islam as the Seal of Prophecy
  - 3) Walî, Nabî and Rasûl
  - 4) The Cycle of Walâyat
  - 5) The internalisation of the cycles of prophecy: the 'seven prophets of your being'
- CHAPTER III – Prophetic philosophy
  - 1) The union of the philosopher and the Nabî, an antidote to the double truth
  - 2) Prophetic Philosophy and Angelology
  - 3) Rejection of the Incarnation and of historicism
  - 4) Prophetic Philosophy and Shi'ism
- CHAPTER IV – Shi'ism
  - 1) Shi'ism or the Esotericism of Islam
  - 2) Shi'ism and Ta'wîl
  - 3) The Threefold Struggle of Shi'ism CHAPTER V – Imamology
- CHAPTER VI - The Twelve Imams, the Configuring Form of the Temple of Prophecy
  - 1) The Twelfth Imam and the Interval of the Occultation
  - 2) Spiritual chivalry
- CHAPTER VII – Ismailism
  - Esoteric Tawhid

BOOK III - From the Metaphysics of Essences to the Theosophy of Presence CHAPTER I - Averroism and Avicennism
- CHAPTER II - Avicenna or a strongly Neoplatonised Aristotelianism
  - 1) The Metaphysics of Essences
- CHAPTER III - Latin Avicennism
- CHAPTER IV - Sohrawardî and 'Eastern' Theosophy
  - 1) Genealogy of Ishrâq

2) Sohrawardî and Iran
CHAPTER V - The Convergence of Philosophy and Mystical Experience
1) The East and the West
2) Presential knowledge and representational knowledge CHAPTER VI – Mulla Sadra or the theosophy of presence as testimony CHAPTER VII – The priority of existence
CHAPTER VIII - Intrasubstantial Movement
CHAPTER IX – Unification of the intellecting subject with the intelliged form
CHAPTER X – The Imaginal and the World of the Soul
CHAPTER XI - The Three Resurrections
1) A Philosophy of Presence as Testimony
2) The Triple Growth and the Posthumous Becoming of the Soul
3) The Legacy of Mollâ Sadrâ's Thought
BOOK IV – From Doctrinal Exposition to Visionary Narrative
CHAPTER I - Avicenna's 'Eastern' philosophy
1) The Tale of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan
2) The Tale of the Bird (Risâlat al-Tayr)
3) The Metamorphoses of the Bird in Persian Mystical Poetry
CHAPTER II – Avicenna and Sohrawardî
CHAPTER III - Sohrawardî and the Visionary Tales
1) The Event as Narrative (Hikâyat)
2) Nâ-kojâ-âbâd (the imaginal world)
3) Active Imagination as an Organ of Supersensible Perception
CHAPTER IV - Western Exile - (an initiatory hikâyat)
CHAPTER V - The Encounter with the Personal Angel - (process of individuation)
1) Angel-Self – Perfect Nature
2) The Two Wings of Gabriel
CHAPTER VI – From the heroic epic to the mystical epic
1) The Ecstatic Sage of Ancient Persia (Kay Khosraw)
CHAPTER VII - Transfigured Eros
1) Beauty, Love, Nostalgia and Sadness
BOOK V – From Human Love to Divine Love
CHAPTER I - Rûzbehân, or the Master of Inspired Paradoxes
1) A visionary par excellence
2) A vision that thinks in images
CHAPTER II - Clouding and the trial of the veil
CHAPTER III - The inner pilgrimage
1) Theophany as Divine Beauty in Man
2) Muhammad, Prophet of the Religion of Love
3) Amphiboly or the phenomenon of the mirror
4) From metaphorical love to true Love
5) From exoteric tawhid to esoteric tawhid
CHAPTER IV - Inspired paradoxes
1) The Malâmatî Sage
CHAPTER V - Ibn 'Arabî and the creative imagination

1) The witness at Averroes's funeral
2) The Pilgrim from the East
3) The disciple of Khizr
CHAPTER VI – The Theophany, the Primordial Cloud and the Divine Names
1) The Divine Names
CHAPTER VII - Creative Imagination as Theophany
1) Conjunctive Imagination and Disjunctive Imagination
2) Imagination as an 'intermediate world'
3) Imagination as spiritual hermeneutics (ta'wîl)
4) God 'imagined' or 'God created in beliefs'
5) Imagination as a meeting place between human love and divine love CHAPTER
VIII - The religion of love
Conclusion – The Relevance of Henry Corbin's Thought
Today Notes
Acknowledgements

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